

Expository Studies in First and Second Timothy

by Ray C. Stedman

These 31 sermons from Paul's letters to Timothy were preached at Peninsula Bible Church,
Palo Alto, California, by Ray Stedman in 1981-82. .

Studies in First Timothy (DP#3764-3781), 18 Messages:

1. Guard the Teaching (1 Timothy 1:1-7) (3764)
2. Awful Lawfulness (1:8-11) (3765)
3. The Model Leader (1:12-17) (3765)
4. Wage the Good Warfare (1:18-20) (3767)
5. The First Thing: Prayer (2:1-7) (3768)
6. Adam's Rib or Women's Lib? (2:8-15) (3768)
7. The Lord's Leaders (3:1-7) (3770)
8. The Lord's Servants (3:8-13) (3771)
9. God's Chosen Instrument: The Church (3:14,15) (3772)
10. The Central Glory (3:16) (3773)
11. Fraudulent Faith (4:1-5) (3774)
12. A Good Minister (4:6-10) (3775)
13. Advice to a Young Pastor (4:11-16) (3776)
14. The Care and Feeding of Widows (5:1-16) (3777)
15. Help for Elders (5:17-25) (3778)
16. Sound Words for Slaves (6:1-5) (3779)
17. The Cost of Riches (6:6-10, 17-19) (3780)
18. O Man of God! (6:11-16, 20, 21) (3781)

Studies in Second Timothy (DP#3782-3794), 13 Messages:

1. The Promise of Life (II Timothy 1:1-7) (3782)
2. The Call to Courage (1 :8-13) (3783)
3. How to Defend a Lion (1:14-2:2) (3784)
4. Soldiers, Athletes and Farmers (2:3-13) (3785)
5. Avoiding Congregational Gangrene (2:14-19) (3786)
6. Fit to be Used (2:20-22) (3787)
7. Guidelines for Controversies (2:23-26) (3788)
8. Dangerous Times (3:1-9) (3789)
9. What you See is what you Can Be (3:10-13) (3790)
10. Thinking Christianly (3:14-16) (3791)
11. The Majesty of Ministry (4:1-4) (3792)
12. The Passing of the Torch (4:5-8) (3793)
13. The End of the Road (4:9-22) (3794)

GUARD THE TEACHING

by Ray C. Stedman

The Apostle Paul's two letters to Timothy, together with his letter to Titus, are often called the "Pastoral Epistles." This is appropriate, in one sense, because these letters were written to young pastors who were involved in the leadership of churches. They constitute, therefore, a kind of handbook for pastors. But I prefer to call the letters the "Filials," rather than the "Pastorals," because *filial* has to do with sonship, and that is what Timothy and Titus were -- sons in the faith of the Apostle Paul. He had led them both to Christ. They were very dear to him, and they had shared many hardships with him on his journeys around the Roman Empire.

In this first letter to Timothy (whom he had left at the church at Ephesus), Paul is giving him counsel and guidance on how to conduct himself in the leadership of that church. The two letters to Timothy have been very difficult for scholars to identify as to the time of their writing. Nothing that Paul refers to in them fits into the history recorded in the book of Acts. Some, therefore, have doubted that Paul even wrote them. Most scholars are now agreed, however, that these are the last letters to come from Paul's hand.

The book of Acts closes with Paul imprisoned in a hired house in Rome, where he stayed for two years. Luke suggests that Paul was released from there, and many scholars feel that after his release from that first imprisonment, Paul traveled with Timothy and Titus around the Roman Empire before going into the East again. He left Titus on the island of Crete to guide the emerging church there, and he brought Timothy on to Ephesus with him where there already was a church that had been long established. The apostle then left Timothy in Ephesus while he himself traveled on up to Macedonia.

Many think that Paul went from there to Spain, and perhaps even to Britain. At any rate, after the apostle had left Timothy, he was subsequently arrested and re-imprisoned in Rome, this time very likely in the Mamertine Prison. In that cold, dark hole, the apostle wrote the second letter to Timothy. Shortly thereafter, as far as tradition tells us, Paul was beheaded on the Ostian Way, outside Rome. These letters, therefore, come from the close of the apostle's ministry. They were written to someone who was very dear to Paul's heart, who was very closely involved with him in the ministry. So we begin the First Letter of Paul to Timothy, a beautiful letter from a father to a beloved son who is undertaking a demanding and dangerous work.

**Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by command of God our Savior and of Christ Jesus our hope,
To Timothy, my true child in the faith:
Grace, mercy, and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord.**

**As I urged you when I was going to Macedonia, remain in Ephesus that you may charge
certain persons not to teach any different doctrine, ... {1 Tim 1:1-3 RSV}**

Verse one sounds a bit formal. Paul identifies himself as "an apostle," but surely Timothy knew that already. It hardly seems necessary for Paul to remind Timothy of his apostolic authority and function. But when you consider the nature of the church at Ephesus you can see why Paul begins in this rather formal way.

The church there was under severe attack. Paul had said this would happen. The 20th chapter of Acts tells of Paul's last recorded visit to Ephesus where, from the port of Miletus, he called to him the elders of the church at Ephesus. In that 20th chapter there is a marvelous, beautiful word of farewell to these elders from the apostle. In the midst of it, in Verse 29, he says to them:

**"I know that after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock;
and from among your own selves [i.e., from among the eldership] will arise men speaking
perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them." {Acts 20:29-30 RSV}**

This was written before Timothy was left at Ephesus. Evidently, these conditions the apostle had anticipated had already come into being. The church was under attack from "fierce wolves from without," and "perverse teachers from within." Therefore, it needed an apostle's authority. Now, Timothy was not sent to Ephesus as a bishop or as an elder. (There were already elders at the church there -- the men whom Paul had addressed in Chapter 20 of Acts.) Rather, Timothy was sent as an apostolic representative, that is, as Paul's substitute, as a bridge from the days of the apostolic leadership of the early church to the more permanent leadership of eldership oversight, guided by the Scriptures, as the Lord intended. The New Testament Scriptures had not yet been written. Timothy, therefore, as the representative of the apostle, constituted the source of scriptural revelation to the church at Ephesus, as the Apostle Paul himself had done.

(In our time, the written Word of God has taken the place of these apostolic representatives. From the 1st century on, the church has been guided and guarded by the apostolic witness to Jesus Christ, recorded in the Scriptures.)

Verse 2 in a very warm and human verse: "To Timothy, my true child in the faith." There is an affectionate reminder of their relationship. And here is an insightful blessing from the heart of the apostle: "Grace, mercy, and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord." Usually, Paul's salutation was only, "Grace and peace." But here, and in the Second Letter to Timothy, he includes the word, *mercy*. I think this was because of Timothy's fears. Mercy is God's grace exercised in deliverance from circumstances, and that is what Timothy needed. Timothy was a fearful, reticent young man -- an introvert, we would say today. But he had a demanding task and a great opportunity. He needed the assurance that God could deliver him, so Paul blesses him with this additional word, "mercy from God the Father."

In Verses 1-11 the apostle tells Timothy what his work in Ephesus would involve. (We are not going to look at all of this this morning; we will just take a portion of it.) But in essence, it was two things:

- First, Timothy was to stop certain teaching that was going on in Ephesus; and

- Second, he was to make clear how to use the Law of Moses in the Christian life -- the lawful use of the Law.

These very important matters have great relevance for us as well; they are fantastically helpful when we understand them. Therefore, we are going to take our time through this letter and try to understand clearly what the apostle had in mind for the church in Ephesus, as he also had in mind for the church in Palo Alto.

The first thing the apostle told Timothy to do was to challenge certain teachers. Verse 3:

As I urged you when I was going to Macedonia remain at Ephesus that you may charge certain persons not to teach any different doctrine, nor to occupy themselves with myths and endless genealogies which promote speculations rather than the divine training that is in faith; whereas the aim of our charge is love that issues from a pure heart and a good conscience and sincere faith. Certain persons by swerving from these have wandered away from into vain discussion, desiring to be teachers of the law, without understanding either what they are saying or the things about which they make assertions. {1 Tim 1:3-7 RSV}

It is highly significant that the first task the apostle set Timothy to doing in Ephesus was to guard the teaching of the church. "Charge certain persons that they must not teach differing doctrines," he says. In other words, the teaching is the most important aspect of the ministry of a church. It must be kept pure and unsullied.

As someone has well put it, "The main thing is to see that the main thing remains the main thing."

The central task of leadership in any church is to see that the teaching is in line with the apostolic revelation, the word about Jesus -- which Paul summarizes in these terms in Verse 11 of this first chapter, "the glorious gospel of the blessed God with which I have been entrusted." That is the body of teaching to which a church should give itself. There are many other subjects that are right for Christians to pursue (the Scriptures encourage us to pursue various dimensions and divisions of human knowledge), but when you come to the church there is one body of teaching, and only one.

The church exists to declare this unique body of truth. Anything that differs is not to be taught in church. Now this does not mean that many in the congregation will not have things they are struggling with.

I have always thought it a mistake to ask brand new Christians to sign a doctrinal statement. How can they sign something they say they believe when they have not yet understood or even studied it? So there may be people in a congregation who are at various stages of doctrinal understanding. But when it comes to teaching, that teaching must be clear and straight and true, and according to the apostolic witness. That is the first thing Timothy is charged to do: Stop the teaching that is different, and oppose these wrong concepts.

This does not mean that these teachers were blatant heretics. They were not. They were probably men from the congregation who, in many ways, were good teachers, but they were beginning to introduce ideas that were derived, basically, from human philosophy. The scholars are divided as to whether this was a Greek form of philosophy, which later developed into what was called *Gnosticism* (which became widespread in the church in the early centuries), or whether these were Jewish philosophies.

Personally, I would lean toward the latter, because of Verses 6 and 7, where these men are said to be "longing to be teachers of the law." If this is the case, these teachers were suggesting Jewish fables, myths and genealogies, here in the church at Ephesus.

It is essential that there be unity in the teaching of a church. There are differences of style that are quite permissible; there are different gifts (they are expected to vary) among teachers; there are different choices of subjects of the revelation of God. The heart of truth, however, must remain unsullied, because the Scripture is the most powerful weapon the church has to correct error and to deliver people from bondage into freedom. The teaching of the truth, therefore, must be central in the ministry.

When we were in Australia recently, we found that, in general, the weakness of the churches there (as it is the widespread weakness of American churches) is biblical illiteracy, a failure to know the Word of God and to understand it. Timothy was sent to Ephesus to correct that condition there. He was to oppose the wrong concepts being taught; and second, to expose their faulty sources, to point out the myths and the genealogies that these people were involved with.

(If these were Jewish myths, as I suspect they were, you will find, if you would like to pursue this further, examples of this in the Old Testament Apocrypha. Some of you who have access to Catholic Old Testaments will find fourteen additional books there that are not in our Protestant Bibles. These are called the Apocrypha, books that were never accepted by the Jews as Scripture, but which were widely circulated in the early centuries. Many of these books are made up of fanciful tales of imaginative accounts, usually about wise men who had remarkable teachings about various themes. This is what was being taught along with the Christian truth there in Ephesus.)

These teachers were also making a great deal of fuss about genealogies. They were laying stress on their ancestry, who they were, where they came from, their family ties, their inherited honors, etc.

There is something about all of us that loves that. When Patrick Cunningham and I were in Edinburgh, walking down the Royal Mile between the great Edinburgh Castle on the west and Holyrood Palace on the east, we found it to be lined with shops offering to trace the tourists' Scottish ancestry. For some reason, everybody who goes to Scotland wants to be a Scot -- everyone tries to trace his ancestry to see which clan he belongs to. Patrick found the Cunningham clan and their tartan there, and he purchased one. (I tried to look up the Stedman clan. They did come from Scotland, but they are not part of a clan. I think they were a group of horse thieves who settled in Angus district. They never made it to the tartan class!) At any rate, there is something about all of us that loves this. We want to trace our roots; and we take a particular pride in descending from some famous person. This is what was being introduced into the congregation at Ephesus.

The indication of how wrong this was, was the effect that it had. You will remember that Jesus said, "By their fruits you shall know them," {Matt 7:20 KJV}. So when you question a teaching, ask yourself, "What does it lead people to do?" Here the apostle tells us very plainly that this teaching promoted speculations, that is, mind trips, fascinating research into themes that tickle the imagination, producing endless debate and specious reasonings (and, I am sure, issuing in the writing of paper after paper to support it). That is what always happens when human philosophy is interjected into the gospel. No matter what its source, it begins to promote speculation and fascinate the mind.

The Bible is a fascinating book. There are many themes in it that trigger the imagination. I find myself intrigued by many of them, and I would long to pursue them at great length.

Now there is nothing wrong with that in itself, except as it so occupies the attention of a congregation that they neglect to understand the great revelation of the Word of God. This takes the place of true biblical study. People begin to pursue speculative matters which take them away from the pure revelation of the Scripture. Timothy was to seek to turn these teachers away from this because it was unhealthy and unprofitable. It resulted in a congregation engrossed in speculative mind adventures.

How was Timothy to do that? Here Paul suggests a third thing. Timothy was to contrast this with the true revelation. He was to charge these teachers not to "occupy themselves with myths and endless genealogies which promote speculations, rather than the divine training that is in faith." Now, that is a very poor translation. It ought to be, "the stewardship from God which is by faith." This stewardship is referred to in many places in the writings of Paul. It is the stewardship which God entrusted to Paul and to us, this body of truth which Paul summarizes in Verse 11 as, "the glorious gospel of the blessed God." That is what these teachers ought to have been studying and teaching -- a deposit of truth given by God to men, and appropriated by faith.

Now, faith is not merely belief. Faith is acting on the basis of facts which God has revealed. This is what the apostle is concerned about. That body of truth is unique in the world. In First Corinthians the apostle calls it that "secret and hidden wisdom of God, which God decreed before the ages for our glorification," {1 Cor 2:7 RSV}. It is the secret of how to release men and women from the bondage of evil of various forms in their lives and deliver them into the glorious freedom of the sons of God. That is the nature of the gospel. It is so powerful and so radical that it is always under subtle attack both from without and within. That is why it is so necessary to ensure that the teaching is accurate and true and biblical, because, when it is, it delivers people, it frees people, it changes whole families; it has a powerful effect upon society. Jesus said that would happen: "If you continue in my word you shall be my disciples indeed and you shall know the truth and the truth will set you free," {cf, John 8:31-32 KJV}. The world desperately needs men and women who have learned how to be free in Christ Jesus, to be what God has intended men and women to be. That is what the gospel can do.

There are two essentials in the gospel. All through Scripture the emphasis is on these two things:

- First, the gospel declares there is a total ending of the old life. This is symbolized for us and conveyed to us, historically, by the cross of our Lord Jesus. The dying of Jesus meant that something about our natural humanity was brought to an end. We are delivered from it. It is dead. It is totally ended.
- The second aspect is the impartation of a new life which is totally sufficient for the believer to live on. That is symbolized for us and conveyed to us, historically, by the resurrection of Jesus from the dead.

There are the two great facts and foci of the gospel: The dying of Jesus, which eliminates the old life, and the resurrection of Jesus, which imparts to us a whole new identity, a whole new basis to live, so we can be new people, no longer hung up by the old bondages and inhibitions that once kept us from being what we wanted to be. That is the gospel. That is the good news.

The essence of Christianity is life. That is the key, the fact from which all else flows. The gospel is the way whereby God has found a means of freeing us from our old life and giving us a new way to live. Remember how John puts it, "He who has the Son has life, and he that has not the Son of God does not have life," {cf, 1Jn 5:12}. It is a mistake to identify the essence of Christianity as a judicial statement by God.

I think that is where the Reformers went astray. Martin Luther and the others merely saw justification by faith as being the decision of God (the Judge) that we were forgiven for our sins. Now, justification does include that -- the Reformers were quite right about that -- but it is more than that. We are forgiven for our sins because we share the life of Jesus. What he is, we are -- that is the central truth of the Christian faith.

Paul says it in Colossians, "Christ, who is our life, shall appear, ..." {Col 3:4 KJV}. He says it in Corinthians, "If any man be in Christ he is a new creation, old things have passed away, behold all things become new," {cf, 2 Cor 5:17 RSV}. That is why, throughout his letters, Paul constantly is exhorting us to "put off the old man which we died to in Christ and put on the new," {Eph 4:22-24, Col 3:9-10}; to "consider yourself dead unto sin and alive unto God," {Rom 6:11}. That is the good news. That is the gospel.

Now these teachers at Ephesus were attacking this. They did not know they were, they did not think they were, but they were, because they were denying that the old life really had ended. By these references to myths and genealogies they were subtly suggesting that there was something of value that carried over from the old life. Your family connections, your ties with the past, the honor, position and prestige which your ancestors had were not rendered valueless, they held. This was an attempt to cling to what was past. By means of these myths they were exalting the mind of man, the wisdom of man, the ability of man to understand and rationalize. They were subtly suggesting (and this still happens today) that everything in the Scripture ought to be subjected to human reason, and what you cannot understand you should reject. This means, ultimately, that the human mind becomes the judge of all truth and reality, whereas Scripture presents it as revelation, confronting us frequently with mysteries we cannot grasp, but which we are to obey. That is what Paul is talking about. Thus, Timothy is sent to correct this. He is encouraged to identify it for what it is by the fact that it "promotes speculations."

Now just as error can be detected by what it produces, so too can truth be detected by what it produces. Paul tells us what it is: "the aim of our charge is love that issues from a pure heart and a good conscience and sincere faith." Here is how you can tell, almost at a glance, what is going on in a church. If a church is giving itself to some subtle form of human philosophy, it will result in endless speculation. (Paul will enlarge on that in just a moment.) But if the truth is being taught and preached and believed, it will always result in a loving congregation. Love is our aim. Love involves activity; speculation involves the mind. Love involves persons, service, compassion, involvement, care, time. That is the way you can tell the difference. The great thrust of the gospel is to produce loving people.

You can tell the gospel is having its effect when that is the effect it has upon you -- when you are becoming a more compassionate, loving, patient, tenderhearted person, and you are reflecting that to those around. That is what Jesus said would happen, and that is why his great commandment to us is that we should love one another.

The apostle now traces the course of love back to its source, its origin, here in Verse 5. I think we will begin to understand more clearly what he is saying if we begin at the end and work back. Paul says, "love that issues from a pure heart," and behind that, "a good conscience," and behind that, "sincere faith." Now, to begin at the end, faith is believing what God has said about the total end of your old life and the impartation of a new life identified with the righteousness of Christ -- that is what you believe. You are a new person; you are not the same. Everything of corrective nature in Christianity is to come back to that source.

(We will see more of that when we get into the passage that deals with Law. The Law cannot change you. You have already been changed. That is the gospel. When you begin to understand and grasp the basis of that change already made you will change. That is what the Scripture is all about.)

Therefore, love begins with sincere faith that the great facts of the gospel are personally true of you. You are the one who died in Christ, and rose again with him, and are seated in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus.

When you believe that, your actions will begin to change. You will begin to see that some of the things you have been doing, and the way you have been living, are not consistent with a changed life. They no longer are the normal outworking of a heart that has been made anew in Jesus Christ. Therefore, these things begin to fade. People do not have to be forced to stop things; they begin to see that these things are inconsistent with a changed life. That is what Paul means when he speaks of a "good conscience." Conscience is the judge of your behavior. It deals with the way you act, either accusing you or excusing you. And, as you begin to be consistent in your actions with what you really are, and see yourself to be, you have a good conscience; it no longer troubles you. You see yourself forgiven, restored, accepted, the past washed away -- not only the past before you became a Christian, but the past as you live existentially through your Christian life. Yesterday, with its sins and mistakes, is cleansed. Every day you begin anew on this basis, living according to a good conscience.

That, in turn, results in a pure heart. The inner attitudes and the thought life begin to change because you are no longer the same person you once were, and you do not think of yourself that way. Your thoughts also begin to change. You find yourself giving up freely and gladly those times when you used to wallow in lustful thoughts. Read *Playbody Magazine* and you find it no longer acceptable to you. It is no longer *you*. You do not want that anymore; you begin to hate yourself for reading it. Your heart is being purified, so that your inner attitudes and thoughts have changed.

Then, as that occurs, you begin to be a vessel for the flowing out of the love of God. As Paul said in Romans 5, "The love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit which is given unto us," {cf, Rom 5:5 KJV}. Love begins to touch you and those all around you. That is the gospel. That is the good news. Paul is so concerned that *that* be clear and uncomplicated in Ephesus that he sent Timothy there to ensure that.

There is a fourth thing Paul tells Timothy about these teachers. Timothy is to recognize their true state -- where they are coming from, as we would put it today. Verse 6:

Certain persons by swerving from these have wandered away into vain discussion, desiring to be teachers of the law, without understanding either what they are saying or the things about which they make assertions. {1 Tim 1:6-7 RSV}

In other words, these teachers become "doctrinal wanderers," wandering about from one aspect of human speculation and philosophy to another. If you watch them over the course of time, one thing is characteristic of them: they never stay with one subject but are always pursuing theological and philosophical fads. This results in what Paul calls, "vain discussion." (The New English Bible put it marvelously: "a wilderness of words," it says.) Endless papers and tortured studies are issued constantly to defend this or that aspect of philosophy. This is one way you can recognize these teachers.

Paul says their motive is a desire for position and reputation, not to see that the truth is taught or that lives are changed. They desire to be "teachers of the law," motivated by ambitious pride. Yet, Paul says, the remarkable thing is that they do not understand what they are saying or the sources from which they take their knowledge. Though they appear to be impressive teachers, they are without any real understanding of reality. That is why these subtle intrusions of doctrinal aberrations must be caught at their source. We must be careful to return to the biblical and apostolic witness of the truth as it is in Jesus. Anything that takes away from our understanding of the totality of the end of the old life -- or from the fullness of supply of a totally new life available to us now -- is a weakening of the apostolic witness and promotes speculations and vain discussions which go nowhere in a church. Timothy's first task, therefore, was to help the elders of the church at Ephesus to understand that they must stop certain teaching that was differing at these points.

In our next study, in Verses 8-11, we want to look carefully at what the apostle has to say about what place the Law of Moses has in the Christian life. This again will be in line with the "glorious gospel of the blessed God," which ought to be the emphasis of every church.

Prayer

We thank you, our Father, for the truth of the gospel. What good news it is that we do not have to endlessly struggle with all the inhibitions and inherited tendencies toward evil that we had in our life, but that these have been ended, and our struggle is to believe that! Grant to us, Lord, that we may learn more fully to believe it and how to appropriate it, that we might enter into life as it is in Jesus; that new life which is available to us, by which we may become loving persons, as he was. We pray in his name, Amen.

Title: Guard the Teaching
By: Ray C. Stedman
Series: Studies in First Timothy
Scripture: 1 Tim 1:1-7
Message No: 1
Catalog No: 3764
Date: Undetermined Date in 1981

AWFUL LAWFULNESS

by Ray C. Stedman

When I was in Nashville, Tennessee, last week, I noticed that city, like many American cities, seems to have a church on every street corner. >From outward appearances, it would seem that our cities are filled with vital Christianity. But that is not the case, because those buildings do not represent, except in but a few cases, any vitality or effectiveness whatsoever. For the most part, those buildings are often empty, and held in contempt by secular society. Their services are pedantic, dry, appallingly dull and dreary. People stay away from them in crowds!

There are two basic reasons for that:

First, churches, and whole denominations oftentimes, give themselves over to a rationalistic unbelief, setting aside the glory and the light of the Scripture. In our pastor's conference at Nashville, we met at a university that was church-related. That university consists of a beautiful set of very expensive Gothic buildings which were obviously designed to accommodate hundreds. The student body today, however, consists of thirty students who are there to study religious education. As I walked about that campus I could see what terrible inroads rationalism had made into a once evangelical and powerful denomination. The irony of it was that in a Gothic arch in one of the buildings the words, "Expect great things from God," were inscribed. Obviously, nothing great was happening there.

There are also many churches today which are still evangelical -- they still subscribe to an orthodox statement of faith -- but they, too, are dead, dull and empty. What has robbed their faith and vitality is a rigid kind of orthodoxy which is legalistic in nature, which has, essentially, maintained "a form of godliness, but denies the power thereof," {2 Tim 3:5 KJV}.

Now, that was the trouble with the church at Ephesus. That was what the Apostle Paul feared was happening to his beloved Christians there, so he sent Timothy to Ephesus to try to correct that condition.

Now, in First Timothy 1:8-11, Paul gives us a very helpful passage in dealing with this problem of how to avoid the awful lawfulness of unlawful law!

Now we know that the law is good, if any one uses it lawfully, understanding this, that the law is not laid down for the just but for the lawless and disobedient, for the ungodly and sinners, for the unholy and profane, for murderers of fathers and murderers of mothers, for manslayers, immoral persons, sodomites, kidnapers, liars, perjurers, and whatever else is contrary to sound doctrine, in accordance with the glorious gospel of the blessed God with which I have been entrusted. {1 Tim 1:8-11 RSV}

Here the apostle deals with four simple, clear propositions:

First: The Law is both good and useful in the Christian life. We know, Paul says, "that the Law is good if any one uses it lawfully." That immediately does away with the claim of many Christians, and the misunderstanding of many, that we are so completely delivered from the Law that we have nothing to do with it anymore. Paul says that is not the case. The Law is good and useful, but it has to be used rightly. So the lawful use of the Law is what we are focusing on this morning.

The Law is good, of course, because God himself gave it. The striking thing about the Law is that, in all of the Bible, Old and New Testaments alike, those Ten Commandments are the only part that God himself wrote. Moses did not write them; Charlton Heston did not write them! They were written by the hand of God on tablets of stone and delivered by angels to Moses on Mt. Sinai. In fact, the Law was twice written by God. After the first tablets were broken, Moses returned to the mountain and God wrote the Law again. That in itself ought to indicate that the Law is important and is not to be done away with.

Furthermore, as you study those Ten Commandments you discover that they reflect the character and the holiness of God. They are an expression of the life of God, both in its outward behavior and its inward attitudes. That is why the Law never will change. The Law represents God's righteous demands for human behavior, anywhere on earth. It is even written into the hearts of people who have never heard of the Ten Commandments. Paul argues this in Romans 2: "When the Gentiles who have not the Law do by nature what the Law requires, ... they show that what the Law requires is written on their hearts," {cf, Rom 2:14-15a KJV}. That is why all human laws -- laws we make for the control of our behavior in city, state and national government -- are all based upon, and reflect, the Ten Commandments. So the Law is not going to be done away with. Paul says it is wholly just and good.

Further, the Law is useful. Even as Christians the Law has a place in our lives, Paul says, "if any one uses it lawfully." Not everything about the Law carries over into the Christian life (Paul will point that out in a moment), but there is a lawful use of the Law in the Christian life. Remember that this was written long after Paul wrote in Romans 7,

We are discharged from the law, dead to that which held us captive, so that we serve not under the old written code but in the new life of the Spirit. {Rom 7:6 RSV}.

That phrase, "not under law," does not mean, however, that the Law has no use in the Christian life. That point needs to be made very clear.

Our Lord himself indicated that in the Sermon on the Mount:

"Think not that I have come to abolish the law and the prophets; I have come not to abolish them but to fulfill them. For truly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the law until all is accomplished. Whoever then relaxes one of the least of these commandments and teaches men so, shall be called least in the kingdom

of heaven; but he who does them and teaches them shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven." {Matt 5:17-19 RSV}

Those words ought to make very clear what Paul insists on here in First Timothy -- that the Law is not eliminated. The Law will always be there because it is holy, just and good; it reflects the character of God. So it does have a part in our Christian experience.

The next proposition helps us identify what part.

Second, Paul says: The Law is not made for the righteous (or the just). "Righteous" is the better term here, because the key component of the gospel is that we are given the righteousness of Christ. In Chapter 3 of Romans, Paul argues that the righteousness of God is made manifest in the gospel. It is for all who believe, Paul says. This is the status we have when we come to Christ.

So the Law is not made for the righteous man. Many Christians have deduced from this the idea that, once you become a Christian you, have no need to refer to the Law of Moses any longer. But Paul is correcting that idea here. He wants us to understand that there is a lawful use of the Law in the Christian's experience, but that the Law was not made for those who are already righteous in Christ.

The reason, of course, is that what the Law requires has already been achieved when you came to Jesus. Remember those great words in Romans 8, where Paul says, "What the Law could not do because it was weak in the flesh, God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh [then here comes the great word] in order that the righteousness that the Law requires might be fulfilled in us [by another process] who walk not after the flesh but after the Spirit," {cf, Rom 8:3-5 RSV}.

Now, it is clear from that that the Law requires something from us. It has a righteous standard; it insists that men behave themselves. That is what God's Law is all about. Not because God likes that, but because it is necessary to the fulfilling of all the possibility and potential of human life. Sin eliminates that, puts us back under bondage and makes us slaves. But the Law says that is never God's intention. He wants to free us.

So there is a certain righteousness required. Those verses in Chapter 8 of Romans tell us that when we believe in Jesus, who died upon the cross for us, and we understand that we were involved in that death, as in his resurrection, we are given righteousness as a gift, handed to us. We start our Christian life on that basis. The life of Jesus has come in; our spirits have been joined to his. As Paul says in First Corinthians 6, "He that is joined to the Lord is one spirit," {cf, 1 Cor 6:17 KJV}. That Spirit is righteous, so our human spirits have already been made righteous in Jesus.

For that reason, the Law has nothing to say to Christians about fulfilling that righteous standard. Our nature is now changed. That is the good news. That is "the glorious gospel of our blessed God," {cf, 1 Tim 1:11 RSV}. We are no longer under Law as a means of winning approval from God. We have his approval already.

Who, then, was the Law given for? Paul goes on to answer that by saying, "the Law is not laid down for the just but for...", then he goes on to list two groups of people for whom the Law was given:

The first three pairs listed there constitute one class, i.e., it has to do with what people are, not what they do. Notice that Paul does not say a word about what people do, rather, what they are: They are "lawless and disobedient," they are "ungodly and sinners," they are "unholy and profane." Those terms describe attitudes, outlook on life, basic, fundamental nature. In other words, the unregenerate.

Everybody starts out life unregenerate. There are no exceptions. I held my little grandson, who is less than a year old, in my arms this morning. He was mad as he could be, yelling his head off, trying to strike at me. If he had had a knife he would have stabbed me, I am sure. We are all born that way. Fortunately, I am bigger than he, so I could control him. But his intent was murderous. Now, the Law is made for that kind of a thing. It has something very important to do to us, which we will look at in just a moment.

The next classification has to do with deeds. It starts with "murderers of father and mothers, manslayers." Then it deals with sexual wrongs, "immoral persons." ("Fornicators" is the idea -- those who indulge in sexual intercourse outside of marriage, either before or within marriage.) Then there are "homosexuals" (that is the word translated "sodomites" here). Then it lists "kidnapers," "liars," and "perjurers." (That last term is applied to an intensified form of lying, where you say you are going to tell the truth, and even take an oath, but still lie.) Then Paul lists them all together in these words, "whatever else is contrary to sound doctrine."

That is a list of deeds which the unregenerate do, but so also do the regenerate. Many of us have fallen into that category. We may

not have been "murderers of parents, manslayers, kidnappers, fornicators, etc.," but how about "liars, perjurers," and "whatever else is contrary to sound doctrine?" The Law is made for the flesh, whether it is active in the unregenerate or in the Christian. Paul makes that clear.

For the unregenerate in both classifications, the Ten Commandments are designed to do three precise things:

First, they reveal the only acceptable standard of behavior before God, both outward actions and inward thoughts.

Second, they were given to make us sin more, to "increase transgression," {cf, Rom 5:20}. That is hard for us to understand. Millions of people today read the Ten Commandments and say that we ought to do those things. They think that the Law is given to them to help them stop sinning, but, according to the Word of God, that is not true. God gave the Law to make them sin even more, because there is a quality about sin that deceives us. Everybody thinks his sin is insignificant. It is other people's sins that are bad. Furthermore, many people convince themselves that there is nothing wrong about what they do. Usually they have a double standard, a second list of names for things they do:

- You have prejudices -- I have convictions.
- You lose your temper and blow your top -- I am indulging in righteous indignation.
- You are spendthrifts -- I am just trying to get ahead in life.

Thus, they convince themselves that they are not sinners. But then the Law comes in and it is so rigid, so unbending, that it makes them angry and rebellious. They do things they did not intend to do. One day they wake up to say to themselves, "I did that? I can't believe it. I must be worse than I thought I was." That is what the Law seeks to do.

Then the third thing the Law does is that it demands punishment, even unto death. It shows no mercy. It will not let anybody off. That is what the Law was intended to do. With the unregenerate, it does so in order that we might be, as Paul puts it, "shut up to grace," {cf, Gal 3:23 KJV}. By means of the Law we discover that there is no way out. There is something so wrong inside that we cannot behave. We can outwardly toe the mark, but inwardly our thoughts and our attitudes are filled with viciousness, self-centeredness and vileness of various sorts. But that is what the Law was intended to do, because at that point we begin to listen to this good word that God has found a way in Jesus Christ to set us free. It shuts us up to the gospel. Or, as Paul puts it in Galatians, it becomes our "custodian" {Gal 3:24-25 RSV}, to keep us in custody until it brings us to Christ. It does its work well. It is not an enemy, but a friend.

But what about some in this second group who do some of these ugly things listed here, yet they are regenerate; they have been born again; they have already been made righteous in spirit?

That is a very ugly list. Young people who are about to join an organization or go to a certain school sometimes show me a pledge which says, "I promise I will not drink, or smoke, or dance, or go to movies, etc.," and ask should they sign it. I always tell them to do so, but to add underneath, "I reserve the right to indulge in malice, envy, jealousy, viciousness and all the other sins of the saints. You never see those sins listed. There are the sins of the saints -- "whatever else is contrary to sound doctrine." That is what we are talking about here.

What does the Law say to people who indulge in those things? I call those people, the "unrestored," because what the Law says to them is: "They need to be restored." For the regenerate, but unrestored, the Law says, restore them to understanding who they really are in Christ. They have forgotten that. That is why Paul says in Galatians,

... if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual restore him in a spirit of gentleness. Look to yourself, lest you too be tempted." {Gal 6:1 RSV}

To a believer, the Law says two of the three things it was sent to do in the first place:

First, it helps us define and recognize sin. It still applies as a standard of righteousness; it is still what God requires of us even though we achieve it by another way. So the Law can be helpful to believers.

There are two examples of this in Paul's writings to the Corinthians:

In First Corinthians, Chapter 9, he says, "... in the Law of Moses it is written, 'Thou shalt not muzzle the ox that treads out the corn,'" {cf, 1 Cor 9:9a KJV}. Paul asks, "Did God write that because he is concerned about oxen?" "No," he says, "it is not just for oxen, it is for us," {cf, 1 Cor 9:9b-10a}. In other words, the law refers to an injustice that applies to people, not just to oxen, and that is that you must not deny benefit to somebody who was involved in a work. Paul, writing to Christians, uses the Law to help them understand that. That is what the Law is for: it is a guide to what is right. In that sense it is rightly used.

Again, in the 14th chapter of First Corinthians, Paul is writing about the problem of women talking too much in church and

disturbing the meetings. He says, "Now don't do that. If you want to ask questions do so of your husband at home and be subject to him, 'as also the Law states,'" {cf, 1 Cor 14:34}. That is not putting them back under Law. It is simply using the Law as an example of the right behavior that God desires. That is the first use of the Law that is lawful.

The second is that it will increase unrighteousness. The reason a righteous person does unrighteous deeds is because his flesh has deceived him. In order to show him that he is deceived, the Law comes in to make him try hard not to do it, and, thus, in rebellion, do no more. That is what Paul is describing in Romans 7. "The thing I would not do," he says, "that I do, and the thing I would do I do not. Wretched man that I am!" {cf, Rom 7:19-20, 7:24a}. That is the Law at work, correcting the flesh in a believer to make visible to him that he is trying to correct himself on a basis that can never work. The most hopeful note in that passage is when Paul cries out, "Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?" {Rom 7:24 RSV}. Immediately, the right answer comes, "Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!" {Rom 7:25a RSV}. Then come the revelations of Romans 8 that we have been talking about -- the fact that we have been made righteous already. We are reminded of that so that we might begin to act on that basis, not on an effort to try to correct by our own determination something that is wrong in our life.

The third thing that the Law was given for can no longer apply to the believer: The Law cannot condemn us. That is why Romans 8 begins on that note, "There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus," {Rom 8:1 RSV}. The Law cannot insist on punishment; it cannot condemn us and make us feel we are subject to the wrath of God. It cannot any longer put us in that relationship to him. God is now our loving Father.

The fourth proposition that emerges from this passage is that the Law in the Christian life, Paul says, must be "in accordance with the glorious gospel of the blessed God." Now, that involves several things:

First, we must recognize that the spirit in an individual who has been born again has already been made righteous. You cannot bring law in to correct somebody's misdeeds by exhorting him to try harder to behave himself. That will never work. He has been made righteous.

I talked with someone just the other day about another individual, a Christian, who was doing something wrong. The one to whom I was talking said, "Yes, what he is doing is wrong, but, remember, his heart is right." That is recognizing that there is a righteousness already there. At the very depths of his being there is a hunger to be righteous. It is to *that* that the lawful use of the Law makes its appeal. Then people can begin to act anew on what they already are. That is in accordance with the gospel.

The second thing that is in line with that is that the only form of punishment that is ever permitted (in accordance with the gospel) is ultimate separation or withdrawal from a Christian who is misbehaving. But only then after completing the three steps of Matthew 18:

1. Go to him privately,
2. Then, if he will not hear you, take one or two others;
3. Then, if he will not hear them, finally, tell it to the church; and if he will not hear, then, "let him be unto you as though he is not a Christian," {cf, Matt 18:17b}.

But there is no penance, no sanction, no execution to be exacted.

Some of the Reformers forgot this. Even John Calvin burned a man, Servetus, at the stake, because the man did not measure up to the "new law" that Calvinism, to a considerable degree, represented.

So these people are simply to be recognized as having given witness themselves that they are not Christians; they have not been made righteous; they have not been changed. Until God moves their hearts to demonstrate that anew, Christians are to treat them as though they are not Christians. That is the only form of punishment allowed.

Third, the lawful use of the Law means we do not impose detailed rules of conduct on others without their consent. We are brothers and sisters, not lords. We are not in charge of other people's lives. That is why it is always legalism to set up a series of rules for other people, telling them that this or that is what they have to do. If you can involve them in agreeing to do something for right and proper purposes, then it is not legalism. Laws and rules are required, they are necessary in life, but they do not change the heart. Until that happens, there has not been a satisfactory fulfilling of the Law.

Fourth, no set of laws or rules can impart life or vitality. Only by returning people to a realization of who they really are -- born anew by the Spirit, filled with the righteousness of Christ, and living under the love of God -- that is what will change people.

I clipped this quotation from a magazine recently:

Laws, rules and regulations define social morality. They are often very little help in the growth of personal morality.

The reason for this is not hard to understand. A law may prevent me from robbing my neighbor, but no law can prevent me from coveting his possessions and thinking of new and devious ways of making them mine. A law can discourage me, if not prevent me, from abandoning my wife and children, but it cannot stop me from making them miserable. A law can inhibit me from knifing an enemy, but it can do nothing if I merely hate him and make him feel my hate. The law, in short, can regulate my behavior, within certain limits. It cannot cleanse my mind, nor purify my heart, nor neutralize the poison of my worst intentions.

The only thing that can accomplish this is the realization of the love of God that is already ours. It has already made us different and that will not change. God deals with us as a loving, tender, merciful, but sometimes relentless, Father. That is what changes us. The lawful use of the Law is to drive us to a fresh realization of the love of God. That is why in Romans 13, Verse 10, the apostle says:

Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore, love is the fulfilling of the law. {Rom 13:10 RSV}

And where the Law is fulfilled, it has nothing more to say, so that inner righteousness becomes, at last, outward righteousness. That was what the Law sought to do in the first place.

I hope this will help us understand what God is doing with us, and what we must and must not do with one another:

We must not go to another person, holding up a set of rigid demands, and say, "Either shape up or ship out." That is, to force them by sanctions.

What we should do is go and say, "Look, you are not this way. Do you really want to be like this? God has made you different. He has given you a whole new way of life. He loves you, and that love becomes a power and a force in your life. Are you going to go on flaunting his love?"

On that basis, power is imparted, and appeal, and correction are made. Then people can see what they need to do, "to reckon themselves dead to sin and alive unto God." That is the lawful use of the Law.

That is authentic Christianity.

Prayer

Lord, we pray that you will help us apply this to the practical details of our interaction with one another. Teach us that we are not lords running other people's affairs, but we are brothers and sisters, deeply concerned and involved with their actions. We pray that we may recognize afresh the glorious good news that we have been made righteous in Jesus Christ, and we can live on that basis. Thank you for that impartation of love, which is power to change. We ask in Jesus' name, Amen.

Title: Awful Lawfulness
By: Ray C. Stedman
Series: Studies in First Timothy
Scripture: 1 Tim 1:8-11
Message No: 2
Catalog No: 3765
Date: Unknown Date in 1981

THE MODEL LEADER

by Ray C. Stedman

In the closing days of his ministry, the Apostle Paul left Timothy in Ephesus in order to correct some of the conditions in the church there. Paul went on into Macedonia, from where he wrote this first letter to Timothy. In his instructions, the apostle speaks not only to Timothy, but to all believers in every generation and to all churches in all ages.

The first task Paul charges Timothy with is to guard the gospel; to oppose certain teachers who were misleading people with strange and perverse ideas about the gospel. Second, Timothy is to instruct the Ephesians on the proper use of the Law in the Christian life. But the apostle knows that instructions are never enough. Models, examples, are needed, so Paul sets forth his own experiences to encourage young Timothy.

So this morning, in Verses 12-17, we are now turning from Timothy's work to Timothy's model. In Verse 11, the apostle has just referred to "the glorious gospel of the blessed God with which I have been entrusted." Then he says, Verse 12:

I thank him who has given me strength for this, Christ Jesus our Lord, because he judged me faithful by appointing me to his service, though I formerly blasphemed and persecuted and insulted him; but I received mercy because I had acted ignorantly in unbelief, and the grace of our Lord overflowed for me with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. {1 Tim 1:12-14 RSV}

Timothy was launched upon a dangerous work. The Emperor Nero had begun persecuting Christians, who were now being pressured by the Roman authorities to choose between Caesar and Jesus as Lord. The Ephesians, among whom Timothy was left to labor, were easily inflamed. The account in the book of Acts of the riot led by the silversmiths of that city demonstrates how quickly a mob could form in Ephesus. Also, Timothy would be confronted with the Jewish teachers who hounded Paul everywhere he went. They too could inflame a riot, as they had done on many occasions. So it is understandable that Timothy would be a bit fearful about working in Ephesus.

Paul's first word of reassurance is wonderful. He tells Timothy how he himself had, from the very beginning of his ministry, been strengthened by the Lord; he was divinely strengthened. Many passages in Scripture describe how Paul had often faced danger, death, rejection, resistance, betrayal, threats and hardships. Though he had, I am sure, great natural courage, it never was enough, because he tells us in several places that when he came into a city to preach the gospel he did not do so with a great sense of triumph and courage. Rather, as he says of Corinth, he came with fear, trembling and uncertainty. He was not met by the city fathers, or by a special committee on evangelization, or by a big propaganda effort, nor was he hosted at luncheons all over town. He came into a city in the dark of the night, in the dust of the road, afraid to say anything at first.

But the Lord strengthened him. That is what Paul wants Timothy to see. Sometimes that strengthening was physical. For instance, Luke tells us that in Lystra, Timothy's own home town, the populace which at first had received Barnabas and Paul with a great welcome suddenly turned against them and stoned Paul. He was dragged out of the city, and left for dead. Yet, as the believers gathered around him and evidently prayed for him, we are told that he rose up and went back into the city. The next day he went on as if nothing had happened because God had restored him and strengthened him.

There is always this possibility of a physical impartation of strength. In the letter to the Colossians, Paul speaks of his preaching and teaching so as to present every man mature in Christ, then he adds, "for this I toil, striving with all the energy which he mightily inspires within me," {Col 1:29 RSV}. This is a supply of actual physical strength which the Lord offers to all his people -- not just to apostles or to preachers, but to anybody who has a task requiring energy that he does not have. The Christian should not give up and say, "I can't do it." He should say, "I can't, but He can. Therefore, I can. Let's go!" This is what the apostle had discovered in his own ministry.

Sometimes the divine supply is mental strength. In Ephesians, Paul speaks of the insight that was given to him in the mystery of Christ, (Eph 3:4 {RSV}). His eyes were opened to see truth that he would not otherwise have seen. The Apostle John speaks of this too: "Jesus Christ has come and has given us understanding," {cf, 1 Jn 5:20 RSV}.

(By the way, this is a good word for students who are facing final examinations. Now God does not promise to teach you something that you have never learned, or that you did not bother to read about. But he will help you to understand what you have read. You can handle a tough examination in a way you never would have thought if you are reckoning upon this strengthening power of Jesus Christ in your life.)

Sometimes the supply imparted is emotional strength. Paul says in Second Corinthians that God, "who comforts the downcast, comforted us by the coming of Titus," {2 Cor 7:6 RSV}. Here is another ministry of the living Christ, right now, in the midst of life.

This is the missing note of Christianity in our day. Christianity is not a philosophy you come to learn about on Sundays; it is a lifestyle to be exhibited from day to day, in every circumstance and situation of life, to let people see (as Paul puts it in Second Corinthians 4:7) that, "we have this treasure in earthen vessels, to show that the transcendent power belongs to God and not to us," {2 Cor 4:7 RSV}. That is authentic Christianity. Everywhere Paul went he experienced this strengthening of the Lord, and it was always to produce effectiveness in his life. In Galatians, he says, "he who worked through Peter for the mission to the circumcised worked through me for the Gentiles," {Gal 2:8 RSV}. In First Corinthians, he says, "I labored more abundantly than them all, yet not I [he always adds that: it is not coming from him, it is not his natural abilities] but the grace of God which was with me," {1 Cor 15:10 KJV}.

Last Sunday night we had the Vacaville prison ministry team with us, reporting on the ministry they had just concluded back in the Eastern states. I was amused at the report of one of the young men on that team, Michael Dinsmore, a relatively new

Christian. He told how, when he shared his testimony of what God had done to him in prison, it had a tremendous effect on people -- they would break down and start crying as he talked. Afterwards, they would tell him, "This is the most exciting meeting we've ever been to! You must share this with the whole church." Then Michael would turn to his leader and ask, "What did I say?" This became something of a joke throughout the whole trip, as he was constantly amazed with the fact that God was doing wonderful things through his simple testimony.

This is a great encouragement to our hearts, because this strengthening is not just for preaching the gospel -- it is for washing the dishes, or for cleaning the car, or for talking to your neighbor over the back fence, or whatever, wherever. "Whatsoever you do, in word or deed" {cf, Col 3:17}, do all to the glory of God and by his grace. That is what Scripture tells us. There must be a continual sense that God is at work, strengthening you.

Imagine how encouraging that would have been to Timothy. He did not have to do this alone -- the Lord was with him. As Paul said to the Philippians, "Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for God is at work in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure," {Phil 2:12b-13 RSV}. That is Christianity.

There is a second word of encouragement to Timothy here. Paul says that he also labored with the realization that he had been divinely appointed to this task, even though he did not deserve it: "He judged me faithful by appointing me to his service, though I formerly blasphemed and persecuted and insulted him."

Paul never got over the wonder of the incident on the Damascus Road. He was on his way to that city to try to imprison all the Christians there -- "breathing out threatenings and slaughter" {Acts 9:1 KJV}, as Scripture puts it -- when he suddenly fell to the ground. There, in the glory of the light that shone around him, he learned who Jesus was. This was made more wonderful by the fact that eventually he came to see that what he once sincerely thought to be zeal and commendable activity for God was, as he puts it here, "blasphemy and persecution and insult" to the God of grace. Yet the Lord chose him.

Paul is not talking about being "called" into the ministry; he is talking about being called to be a Christian. We all share this with him. We are being asked to stand up and acknowledge the Lordship of Jesus over a world that, by and large (and increasingly so) has rejected him and wants nothing to do with him. It is our privilege to honor him and to testify to his grace in the hour of his rejection. There is coming a day when the whole universe is going to acclaim Jesus as Lord: "... every knee should bow, ... every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father," {cf, Phil 2:10b-11 RSV}. But what good will it do in that day when you are forced to bow the knee and acknowledge who he is? The privilege is to do it in a day when people are turning their backs on him. This is what the apostle sees as his, and Timothy's, ministry.

We too can see it as our ministry.

Timothy had no Damascus Road experience. Nobody else has. God does not call his people in the same way. We each have a unique experience of coming to Christ. (In the next paragraph Paul is going to remind Timothy that there were certain prophetic utterances which pointed to him. That was God's way of calling Timothy.) I do not know how he has called you, but somewhere along the line, if you are a Christian at all, there came a moment when you were aware of the quiet insistence of the Holy Spirit calling you, saying, "I want you." The Spirit of God does that. In a quiet moment, in ways that are unique to us, the Spirit of God says, "You are the one. Even though you have been my enemy, even though you have done hateful things, even though you didn't like me and didn't want anything to do with me, I want you. I have appointed you to be my spokesman."

But the most encouraging word in this passage is in this next section. There, the apostle says he was divinely forgiven -- in fact, he keeps on being divinely forgiven and changed -- by the mercy of God. Verse 13b:

... I received mercy because I had acted ignorantly in unbelief, and the grace of our Lord overflowed for me with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. The saying is sure and worthy of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners. And I am the foremost of sinners; {1 Tim 1:13b-15 RSV}

In this amazing statement, Paul is clearly indicating his awareness that, first, he received mercy because he was ignorant of what he was doing. Bad as his actions were, fighting against the Lord himself, persecuting the church, hounding Christians to death, at least, Paul says, it was not deliberate rebellion against light, against knowledge and truth he understood.

Young Saul of Tarsus thought he was doing right. We could say he could have known better. He had the Scripture; he should have known better. That is always true. Any of us could have known better than we did; we should have known better. Most of us have been exposed to far more light than we can handle. We could have avoided many of the things we have done. But, the fact is, Paul did not know any better; he was blinded. Thus, he was brought under our Lord's prayer on the cross, "Father, forgive them for they know not what they do," {Luke 23:34}.

That is a great, compassionate prayer. It takes recognition of the fact that we do not understand life very well. It underscores one

of the most frightening powers of sin -- its ability to deceive us, to make us believe lies and follow untruth and fantasy that lead us into difficulty and hurt. Yet we think that we are doing the right thing. The amazing thing is not that there are some people who do wrong and know it. Rather, the amazing thing is how many people think they are doing the right thing, yet they are tearing up their families and destroying their homes, wrecking their marriages, ruining their lives, and their health. All the time they think they are doing right, living good, clean, moral lives. That is the deceitful power, the blinding character of sin. God constantly works to bring light into our darkness; and Scripture warns us against continuing to sin when this light increases.

I think the question most often asked of pastors is, "What is the unpardonable sin?" I get letters all the time, saying, "I think I've committed the unpardonable sin. What do you think?" What is "the unpardonable sin?" people ask. The answer from the lips of the Lord himself, and confirmed by the apostles, is, to turn your back on Jesus. When the Holy Spirit has shown you clearly and unmistakably who he is, and what he can do, and when you fully understand that (that is a rare condition that not many people arrive at; most of us labor on with a great degree of confusion and bewilderment), yet you still turn your back on him, then, Hebrews 6 tells us, "It is impossible to renew them again unto repentance, seeing they crucify to themselves the Son of God and put him to an open shame," {cf, Heb 6:4-6}. That is the unpardonable sin.

There are many stages before you get there. I have always pointed out to people that if there is concern in their hearts to want to be right that clearly indicates they have not yet committed the unpardonable sin. Paul was there. He received mercy, he said. His proud ignorance was relieved by the sudden flash of light and knowledge on the road to Damascus. And, as he tells us here, "the grace of our Lord overflowed for me with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus."

Those are very revealing words. When you come to Jesus Christ, two things, especially, are given to you:

The first is faith. Faith is the ability to see things realistically, the way they really are, to have all the illusions taken away and to begin to live in line with reality. It is very encouraging to understand that only Christians live realistically. We do not all do it so well at times but Christians are the ones who finally face life as it really is. It is the world that is confused, following after fantasies and chasing after rainbows. But when you become a Christian you see things the way they really are.

The second thing that is given to you when you come to Jesus Christ is love, a desire to reach out to someone else, to minister to the hurt in another person. Compassion awakens when you come to Christ. It is very helpful to us to understand this, because most of us struggle in this area. If you are not able to love very effectively, then, for heaven's sake, don't just try to do those things. That will get you nowhere. Draw near to Christ. He is the author of faith and the perfecter of love. When you draw near to him, when you let him love you, and you glory in his forgiveness, you will find your eyes being opened and your heart warmed. That is what Paul experienced. Love overflowed; it was abundantly given to him, he says. Not only at the beginning, but, as we will see in a moment, throughout his life.

But the apostle is not through. Now he gives us a special little formula of emphasis. Verse 15:

The saying is sure and worthy of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners. {1 Tim 1:15a RSV}

In the Gospels you find that Jesus speaks this way on occasion: "Truly, truly, I say unto you..." When you read that little formula in the Gospels, take your red pen and underline what follows. When he uses those words Jesus is simply saying, "Pay attention: This is important!" That is what Paul is doing here. Five times in his letters to Timothy he uses this little formula, "The saying is sure and worthy of all acceptance," and each time he is underlining a very fundamental statement. These were the memory verses of the early Christians. They did not go around with Navigator cards; they just put these verses into their hearts and memorized them.

This is the first of them:

"Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners."

That sounds simple to us, yet it is very profound. All of us were mixed up, confused, bewildered, darkened in our understanding, alienated from the life of God. Read Paul's descriptions in Ephesians about what we were like before we came to Christ. Everybody -- brilliant minds, highly educated people -- everybody is in the same boat. Christ Jesus came to take away the darkness, unveil the mysteries, remove the illusions, reveal reality, and awaken love, compassion, mercy and ministry to others. This is the purpose of Christianity.

Then Paul says what is the most astonishing thing of all in this passage: "Christ came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief," {1 Tim 1:15b KJV}. If he had said, "I was the chief," we would all understand that, because certainly he was in the forefront of the ranks. But now, looking back, his life almost over, he says, "I am the chief of sinners."

That causes many people a lot of trouble. They read those words and say, "Has Paul forgotten what he said in some of his letters?"

Has he forgotten these words he wrote in Galatians 2:20, 'I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me; and the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God'? Has he forgotten what he said in Second Corinthians 5:17: 'If any man is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has passed away, behold, the new has come'? Surely he can't forget that he has been redeemed, he has been made righteous. He cannot call himself the chief of sinners." But he does.

Some commentators say that this is a kind of humble exaggeration, like we sometimes say, "I'm not all that good, really." I do not think it is false humility. Paul means every word of this. He has not forgotten what he has written. What he is thinking of is not what he is in Christ (because that was made righteous and delivered, the power of sin was broken), but he is thinking about himself as a total man living in a world of evil; he is thinking of himself as we have to think of ourselves, made whole in Christ, and yet with the flesh still active in our lives. We still struggle against it. It is no longer us, but an alien invader still able to exercise its deceiving power over us.

There is hidden here a very important principle that all of us will have to learn some time or other. Whatever the flesh once manifested itself to be in our lives -- some extreme form of evil, whatever we have done that is now, in our own sight, bad, ugly, something we are ashamed of -- we have to remember that *that* is an area of weakness that needs to be guarded very carefully, because we can return to that in an instant, no matter how long we have been Christians. That is what Paul is talking about. He is looking back on his life, remembering when he thought he was right, when he thought with all his heart that he was pleasing God, yet he was so wrong that he is now appalled to look back on it. He remembers now how pride once deceived him. That is what the Bible calls, "the sin which does so easily beset us," {Heb 12:1 KJV}. In some cases it is lust, in some cases it is temper, in some cases (as with Paul) it is pride.

All his life Paul had to struggle against being proud. In Second Corinthians 12, he said God helped him by giving him a thorn in his flesh to keep him humble, {cf, 2 Cor 12:7}. There was a lifelong struggle, and yet notice what Paul says (Verse 16),

... but I received mercy for this reason that in me, as the foremost [sinner], Jesus Christ might display his perfect patience for an example to those who were to believe in him for eternal life. {1 Tim 1:16 RSV}

Here is the second reason Paul gives why he received mercy. God looked over the whole crowd and found the proudest man of all, the man who was so conscious of his own abilities that it blew the fuse of reality in his mind. Because he was that way, and had to struggle with that all his Christian life, Paul says, the Lord deliberately chose him that he might be an example to others who had to struggle with any kind of besetting sin.

How patient Jesus Christ can be! How patiently the Lord had worked with this apostle! How often he had forgiven him! How many times Paul had caught himself acting in arrogance, or was tempted to so act, and had to run back to the Lord to confess his weakness and receive restoring grace! Paul now holds himself up as an example to Timothy and says, "Don't be discouraged. You may fail from time to time, but God is still with you. He is patient with you. He will pick you up right where you are and use you again. All you need to do is walk carefully and see that you keep close to his side. He demonstrated in me how patient he can be, how willing he is to work with somebody whose natural temperament is absolutely opposed to all that Christianity stands for."

That is so wonderful to Paul that he cannot contain himself at this point, so he breaks into praise (Verse 17):

To the King of ages, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory for ever and ever. Amen. {1 Tim 1:17 RSV}

Paul's heart is moved to remember how gracious the Lord Jesus has been to him; how many times he has forgiven and restored him; how he has constantly, patiently, set himself against all the natural temperament of this proud, arrogant young Pharisee.

Prayer

Our Father, once we were blind; we could not see ourselves; we could not understand what was hurting us so badly; we could not see what we were doing to each other, how we were wrecking each other's lives and sabotaging each other's plans. Yet, Lord Jesus, you came and invaded our lives and began to take away the veil and to help us to see what we were like. Thank you for that. Thank you for the love that has bloomed within our hearts, the compassion and mercy that we feel both to others and to ourselves. Thank you for the healing of your Spirit, for the fact that we are recipients of your grace. Like the apostle, we pause to give thanks and to praise the King of the ages, immortal, invisible, the only God, to him be honor and glory now and for ever, Amen.

Title: The Model Leader
By: Ray C. Stedman

Series: Studies in First Timothy
Scripture: 1 Tim 1:12-17
Message No: 3
Catalog No: 3766
Date: Unknown Date in 1981

WAGE THE GOOD WARFARE

by Ray C. Stedman

It is sometimes helpful to pick out certain verses of a biblical passage which summarize in concise terms what the passage is all about. We have a phrase which does just that in this section from Chapter 1 of Paul's first letter to Timothy, beginning with Verse 18:

This charge I commit to you, Timothy, my son, in accordance with the prophetic utterances which pointed to you, that inspired by them you may wage the good warfare, holding faith and a good conscience. By rejecting conscience, certain persons have made shipwreck of their faith, among them Hymenaeus and Alexander, whom I have delivered to Satan that they may learn not to blaspheme. {1 Tim 1:18-20 RSV}

The phrase that summarizes this entire letter is,

"Wage the good warfare, holding faith and a good conscience."

That is the heart of all that Paul says in this letter to Timothy.

In his second letter to Timothy, Paul says of himself, "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to me on that day, and not only to me but also to all who have loved his appearing," {2 Tim 4:7-8 RSV}. There is the word of a man who is about to leave the battle of life. But here in First Timothy is Paul's word to this young Christian, probably in his early or mid-twenties, who is being left to do a very dangerous and demanding work in Ephesus. The apostle tells him to "Wage the good warfare," and, "Hold fast to faith and to a good conscience."

Notice that Paul puts it very definitely. He does not say, "Fight a good fight," or, "Wage a good warfare." This is not the word of a coach encouraging someone to get in there and do his best. Paul is talking about the Christian life.

The fundamental nature of Christianity is that it is a warfare in which we are all involved; and there is no exit until the end. The moment you began your Christian life, by faith in Jesus Christ, you entered a lifelong battle. And this struggle is not intended to be easy. Many Christians today forget that. Helped along somewhat by a lot of misleading teaching on the television and other media, there is a widespread attitude today that when you become a Christian God began working for you so everything has to work out. People are being taught that they are in the will of God because bridges appear mysteriously across the chasms of life. Rubbish! If that is the sign of being in God's will, then Paul was out of God's will most of his life. He knew he was in a battle, and he tells Timothy that he too is going to be in a battle.

The object of this warfare is not to survive to the end of life, as many Christians think. Even non-Christians are fighting the battle to keep healthy and stay alive. Everybody is engaged in that battle. That is not the Christian warfare. Paul is talking about being a Christian, about living a Christ-like life in the midst of dangerous pressures and countering forces. That is the battle. In other words, to be realistic in a world of illusion, to not chase after all the fantasies that the world falls for, to not allow yourself to think wrongly about what is going on in society, but to get God's point of view, to see things the way they are and to deal honestly, realistically and openly with everything that comes -- that is the battle.

That is the way Jesus dealt with life. He did not hide away in some monastery. He was out in the midst of life, in the marketplaces, in the cities, among peoples, under the pressures and dangers of everyday life. He was a realist who dealt earnestly and honestly with life.

The battle Paul is talking about is to be a loving person who has concern and compassion for people in times of harassment, when others are giving way to expressions of hate and violence and bigotry. The battle is to live redemptively among those who have lost their way, to turn them away from that which is destroying, to be involved with them and to give of yourself in order to bring them back into a relationship of truth and reality. The warfare is to live your life for a purpose, not merely to spend it on yourself.

What makes it tough is that we are opposed by three resourceful and utterly ruthless enemies called, the world, the flesh, and the devil. People are not the enemy. I do not know why it is so difficult to get this across, but I find that very many Christians are confused at this point. They think their problems are other people, but Paul tells us in Ephesians 6, "We do not wrestle against flesh and blood," {cf, Eph 6:12a KJV}. People are not the problem. The world thinks, "If we could just get rid of the IRS, or our in-laws, or our bosses, or change the administration. Those people are sabotaging our plans, wrecking our lives and making things difficult for us." But people are not the problem. All people are victims, according to the Word of God, victims like ourselves. They need compassion and understanding, not condemnation and ostracism. Behind people are the real enemies -- the world, the flesh, and the devil.

The world is society, committed to a godless philosophy which says, "Enjoy yourself now. This is all you've got. Eat, drink and be merry, for tomorrow we shall die." This philosophy is shouted at us every time we turn on a television or a radio. Everywhere we hear, "You deserve the best. You've got it coming to you. Take it now. Don't let anybody stand in your way." That is the world, the enemy that opposes us.

Then there is the flesh, this alien nature within us which used to belong to us, but, since we have come to Christ, it is no longer us; we have been delivered from it. But it is still there, opposing us from within. It is dedicated to selfishness. It loves attention, and comfort, and anything illegal, immoral, or fattening. The enemy is this self-centeredness within us:

I had a little tea party this afternoon at three.
'Twas very small, three guests in all,
Just I, myself and me.
'Twas I who ate the sandwiches
And I drank up the tea.
'Twas also I who ate the pie
And passed the cake to me.

That is life. That is the flesh.

Then there is the devil, and all the hosts of fallen angels that Scripture speaks of, and of which Jesus took constant note in his ministry. These master psychologists know exactly what it takes to make us feel fearful, angry, discouraged, or worthless. When we feel any one of those emotions we have already succumbed to what the Bible calls, "the wiles of the devil," {Eph 6:11b}. The devil has accomplished his purpose, at least temporarily, with us.

So there is the battle -- to be Christ-like, loving, forgiving, understanding, and pure in the midst of those pressures. This is what Paul is referring to when he encourages Timothy to, "Wage the good warfare."

If you want some helpful books on this, I suggest you read *The Screwtape Letters*, by C. S. Lewis. This is a great revelation of how the devil gets at us in our thought life. Or read *Pilgrim's Progress*, by John Bunyan, that incomparable record of what the Christian life is like on its way to glory, and the nature of the enemies that face us. John Bunyan was given great insight into the warfare the Christian is involved in.

It is rather startling to note here the incentives Paul uses to stimulate Timothy to "wage the good warfare." I would expect at this point that Paul would say something like, "Remember, Timothy, 'He that is in you is greater than he that is in the world,'" because that is a great truth. We are not left alone in this battle. We have inner fortifications and strengthenings that the world knows nothing about, because, "He that is in us is greater than he that is in the world," {cf, 1 Jn 4:4}. But Paul does not say that. Nor does he say what Peter says, that, "we will be kept by the power of God unto salvation," {cf, 1 Pet 1:5 KJV}. Nor does Paul say, with Jude, "Now unto Him who is able to keep you from falling and to present you faultless before his presence in glory," {cf, Jude 1:24 KJV}. Though these things are true, Paul uses something much more humble and prosaic, something much closer to home. He refers to Timothy's desire to please him, and to Timothy's hunger to fulfill the possibilities that others saw in him.

So this is what Paul wrote: "This charge I commit to you, Timothy, my son." That personal, affectionate word must have greatly encouraged this young man's heart. He thought, "Paul considers himself my father. He loves me as a son. He trusts me. He believes in me. He sent me here to labor in Ephesus."

Years ago, a young man said something that struck me very forcibly. His father, whom he idolized, had just died, and he said to me, "What do you do when the only man you have ever wanted to please is dead?" I sensed that he had lost incentive, that a great moral force had disappeared from his life. It helps a great deal to know that someone believes in you, and trusts you.

So Timothy must have been greatly encouraged by this. Paul urges him to the task of waging a good warfare by remembering that he believed in him, and had confidence in him. But even more than that, there were certain "prophetic utterances" that pointed to Timothy, the apostle says. Evidently this is something that occurred when Timothy was set aside by the church at Lystra to

accompany Paul in his travels, (Acts 16). Timothy, half Greek, half Jew, had been a Christian since Paul's first visit to that city about a year or more earlier. Having been observed by the church for that period of time, Timothy had grown so in grace and spiritual stature that the church agreed with Paul's suggestion that he come along with him on his travels.

The elders of that church gathered around Timothy, as Paul tells us in the second letter to Timothy, and laid their hands on him, and at that time certain prophetic utterances were given. We are not told what they were, but evidently, speaking by the Spirit, someone predicted what Timothy's ministry would be like. This must have been somewhat like Jacob's blessings of his sons, recorded in the 49th chapter of Genesis, where Jacob predicts what the nature of their ministry will be. So Paul reminds Timothy that, by the Spirit, God had led certain ones to indicate that this young man was to have a great ministry. It would be an encouragement to him to remember that.

I will never forget an incident in my own ministry when I was a young man. I was still a student at Dallas Seminary, but was spending my summers in Pasadena. I worked one summer as a youth minister in a church there, when Dr. Lewis Sperry Chafer, the President and founder of Dallas Seminary, a great man of God, a great man of faith, came into town. He was gracious enough to spend an afternoon with my wife and me.

I took Dr. Chafer to the church where I was working and showed him around the very impressive, beautiful building. The congregation at this time did not have a pastor, though they were seeking one, so Dr. Chafer said to me, "Do you think you might end up here in this church?" I said, "I don't know. Who knows what God will do? I don't have any particular plans for that." "I don't know either," he said, "but it would be a good place for you because I believe God is going to give you a great ministry." I do not know what he had in mind by that. He may have been impressed by the beauty of that building. (I am sure he did not realize that someday I would end up in a building like this, where the architecture is clearly early Safeway!) But his words have been a great encouragement to my heart. Many times as a young man I remembered that Dr. Lewis Sperry Chafer had seen something in me that was an encouragement.

Sometimes the great promises are too much for us to handle. What we need is something right at hand -- the remembrance that somebody believes in us, that somebody has confidence that God is going to do something with us. That is what Paul says would encourage Timothy -- "inspired by them you may wage the good warfare." The central thing, of course, is, "How do you wage the good warfare?" Paul says it requires two things: "holding faith, and a good conscience." Hold to your faith, he says. Believe what God has told you:

- Faith is accepting the radical truth which Jesus and his apostles have given to us, understanding that this is a description of life as it really is.
- Faith is believing truth about God, about his power, about his control of history and all humanity, of his love for us as a lost race which he does not choose to abandon, but takes steps to redeem and bring to himself.
- Faith is learning about the nature of sin and the reason why life is often filled with misery, not because of others, but because of us. We are the problem. We have something within us that is constantly destroying our plans, wrecking our happiness and destroying our relationships. This needs to be dealt with, and the only thing that can handle it is the word of the cross; learning what Jesus did in the mystery of the darkness of the cross, how some transference was made in a most remarkable way in which our sin was placed on him and his righteousness was given to us.
- Faith is learning about his resurrection and the impartation of his life so that he himself comes to live within us -- "Christ in us, the hope of glory," {cf, Col 1:27b}.
- Faith is learning that he himself will grant to us in every situation the wisdom and the power that it takes to live righteous, godly, Christ-like lives.
- Faith involves taking all this personally, to ourselves, believing that God has done this for us.

We now have our resources, our power to live coming from him. Hold to that, Paul says. Do not deviate from it. Do not lose that. That is your ground of security. That is the resource from which you can live.

But with faith there must be a good conscience.

I find a great deal of misunderstanding, even among Christians, on what the conscience is. Many feel that the conscience is given to us to teach us the difference between right and wrong. But nothing could be further from the truth. No, the conscience is given to us, rather, to resist any deviation from the truth, from the right and the wrong that we know. If you think it is given to us to indicate what is wrong or what is right, you will begin to rely upon your feelings to determine right and wrong. That is where many go astray -- many young Christians, especially. They think their conscience is their feelings; and if they feel something is right then they do it.

You have seen the bumper stickers that say, "If it feels good, do it." People actually believe that is following their conscience. Because of that philosophy thousands and thousands of lives are being warped and twisted.

The conscience is given to us so that when we know what is right and what is wrong, it insists that we do the right and avoid the

wrong. But it is the Word of God that teaches us what is right and what is wrong. Conscience is like a gyroscope, set in a certain direction, which resists any tendency to deflect it. Conscience, however, can be set in a wrong direction, then it will guide us wrongly. Revelation, the Word of God, is what tells us what is right and what is wrong. Conscience is given to us to help us know when we are beginning to fail, or fall away from that right path.

In other words, a good conscience is a synonym for an obedient heart which wants to do what God says is right. That is what Paul is talking about. Wherever God speaks, and you know what he tells you to do, regardless of what your flesh or your feelings say, obey; do what God says. That is the way to maintain a good conscience. If you fail, correct it instantly by the provision that God has made: confess, repent, set it straight, then go on with God.

A good conscience works with faith, that which lays hold of the resources of God in dependence on him. So a good conscience is the discipline of the mind and the will that says, "I will follow my Lord and do what he says to do." Jesus spoke of this. He put the Christian life in a nutshell when he said, "You in me, and I in you," {John 14:20b RSV}. "You in me" -- that is our definite determination to follow him; "I in you" -- that is the resource he commits to us to enable us to follow and to obey him. The Christian life is these two things working constantly: to know what is right, and, by the power and grace of God, to resolve to do it. That is waging a good warfare. How beautifully that maintains the biblical balance between the sovereignty of God and the free will of man! Here is the secret of Christian vitality. When God tells you what is right, by his grace, relying on him, choose to do it.

This is so important that Paul expands on it. He says, "By rejecting conscience, certain persons have made shipwreck of their faith." These are people who know the truth, but because they have not chosen to obey it, they not only have wandered away, they have eventually damaged their faith. They start believing wrong instead of right. They know what is right, but they are no longer able to do it.

Today we are surrounded by hundreds of examples of people who have ship-wrecked their faith by failing to keep a good conscience. The order is very important. Somehow, when you choose not to do something you know is right, you introduce confusion into your whole mechanism of guidance in the Christian life. You start to follow wrong paths which begin to determine and deflect your faith. You no longer see things the way you once did.

I am reminded of the young man who drew the plans for this church building many years ago. He and his wife, a vigorous young Christian couple, joined our congregation. He was raised on the mission field, the son of missionary parents. He was a pilot, and I flew with him several times in a private plane. On long trips together I came to know him very well. We studied the Word of God together, and he grew in faith, and evidence of understanding. He went on to seminary for four years, then after graduating he taught in a Bible school. Somewhere, about that time, however, he failed to obey what God had set before him to do. Soon afterwards he dropped out of his teaching position. After a bit his marriage broke up. Today he is living in the Sierra Nevadas, teaching school. He is on his third marriage. He has totally denied his Christian faith, claiming now to be an atheist. He has made shipwreck of his faith and of that of his family as well.

This happens frequently today. It explains why some outstanding Christian leaders whom you yourself have followed, people you have held up as an example of faith and commitment, have suddenly fallen, because they did not hold to conscience; they did not obey what they taught. Somewhere along the line they thought the holding of the truth in the mind was enough.

Paul speaks of two such men here, Hymenaeus and Alexander. We do not know much about them, although they are mentioned elsewhere in these letters to Timothy. In the second letter, Hymenaeus is said to be one who taught that the resurrection was already past, overthrowing the faith of some, (2 Tim. 2:18). Yet Paul does not say that Hymenaeus had begun by deviating from doctrine. Somewhere along the line, as Paul suggests here, he had not practiced truth; he had rejected conscience. That led him at last to the error he espoused.

In the second letter to Timothy, Paul speaks of Alexander, the coppersmith, who, he says, had done him great harm. "Beware of him, Timothy," Paul says. "He will do you a lot of damage if you get mixed up with him," {cf, 2 Tim 4:14-15}. What harm he had done the apostle we do not know, but it was this Alexander evidently who had chosen not to act upon truth that he knew, had not followed with a careful, close heart to the Lord, but had rejected conscience and had ultimately "shipwrecked his faith." Paul says of these two, "I have delivered them to Satan that they may learn not to blaspheme."

This is not a single act, suddenly taken in the heat of anger. This is the result of a long course of spiritual deterioration which ends in the fourth step suggested by our Lord in Matthew 18. (Last Sunday we had to take the third step in regard to a brother in our midst.) There in Matthew 18, the Lord says that step one is, if your brother has done something wrong, committed a sin, turned aside, go to him and tell him his fault between you and him alone. If he hears you, that is the end of the matter; you have gained your brother. But if he does not, then take two or three with you and go again. That is step two. If he hears them, fine; say no more to anybody else. But if he does not, there has to come the time when you tell it to the church. That is the third step. The whole church is to be engaged in trying to reach an erring brother or sister, someone who has turned aside from the faith. If he does not hear them, then the fourth step comes, which Paul calls, "delivering [him] unto Satan." Jesus said, "Let him be unto you

as a publican and a sinner" {cf, Matt 18:17}, i.e., as not even being a Christian. By this Paul means, put him back into the world; regard him as having denied by his actions the testimony of his words. This does not mean to have no contact with him. This is not an act of excommunication that affects his spiritual life. It is clear from this very passage that Paul intends this to be remedial -- so that these men may learn that testifying of truth but not acting on it is blasphemy. This is destroying the image of God in the eyes of others, making God look ridiculous because they are not consistent in the walk. So Paul says, "I have turned them over. Let Satan have his way with them. He will damage them, he will hurt them, he will destroy much of their lives, but in the process they will learn that the One who loves them, who can heal them. who can forgive them, is God alone." So this action is to be taken with the hope that they will eventually return to the Lord.

After last Sunday's service I heard of a very remarkable incident. Some friends here in the congregation told me that when one of their friends, a young Christian man, was journeying by bus from Denver, Colorado, to Washington, D. C., a few weeks ago, he sat beside another young man who told him that his name was John W. Hinckley, Jr. During the whole course of that long bus ride of well over fifteen hundred miles, this young Christian witnessed to John Hinckley. The next day the terrible news broke that Hinckley had attempted to assassinate the President of the United States. Yet this man had just heard a long Christian witness, lovingly given, which must have reminded him that he came from a Christian family, and that God had made many attempts to turn him toward righteousness and truth.

This morning after the 8:15 service a woman told me the sequel to the story, on good evidence, that Hinckley's father visited him in prison during this last week and was enabled to lead him to the Lord. This is a case of a young man who may even have been a Christian (at least he was exposed to Christian testimony) who had rejected conscience and had lost faith. But God has not rejected him. He has sought him and is taking him through deep and dark things. Prison awaits him. He has been delivered unto Satan that he might learn not to blaspheme, but that God alone is the One who can forgive him.

The question this leaves us with is: "What are we doing?" We are called by Christ, called to live a Christian life in a godless world. This is not something to take lightly, something to do on weekends, a low-calorie dessert to add to life to make it more agreeable. We are soldiers in a battle, a fierce war against sin, called by Christ himself to "wage a good warfare, to hold fast to the faith, to hold to a good conscience." God's image in the eyes of others is at stake. We are to live redemptively in the midst of a fallen world.

Title: Wage the Good Warfare
By: Ray C. Stedman
Series: Studies in First Timothy
Scripture: 1 Tim 1:18-20
Message No: 4
Catalog No: 3767
Date: Unknown Date in 1981

THE FIRST THING: PRAYER

by Ray C. Stedman

The first assignment the Apostle Paul gave to Timothy in regard to the church at Ephesus was to correct the teaching, which had begun to drift from the apostolic revelation into controversial areas that were destructive to faith. Timothy was to set that straight, using Paul as his model. He was also to stress the need for obedience -- that people actually do what they teach. That is always the first step toward vitality in a Christian's experience.

In Chapter 2 of First Timothy we now come to the second assignment the apostle gave to Timothy, and that is to set in order the public worship of the assembly in Ephesus. That is a relevant subject for us, because that is why we come together every Sunday morning. Public worship is a very revealing indication of what is going on in a church.

You perhaps remember the story of the man who was going through a church building one day with his son. The boy noticed a bronze plaque on the wall and asked his father what it was for. The father replied that it was a memorial plaque to commemorate the young men who had died in the service. The boy asked, "Which one, the morning or the evening service?"

The factors that make for life in a service are the same today as they were in the early centuries, i.e., the elements of Christian worship are basically the same -- prayer, praise, and preaching. This is what the apostle says to Timothy (Verse 1):

First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be

made for all men, for kings and all who are in high positions, that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life, godly and respectful in every way. {1 Tim 2:1-2 RSV}

Paul gives a little priority list here of the elements that are to be emphasized:

First of all he lists public prayer: the people of God encountering God himself on behalf of their fellow Christians and people in the world around. That is to be the primary factor in terms of emphasis in a gathering of the church. I wonder how much we have drifted from that pattern today?

The apostle put prayer first for two very good reasons.

1. First, because prayer focuses people's hearts and eyes on God right at the very beginning. What makes a church service different from the gathering of the Kiwanis Club, or the Rotary, or whatever, is that God is recognized; he is in our midst. To acknowledge the power, the beauty, and the liberty that the presence of God imparts is to immediately give a sense of reality and vitality to a service.
2. Then, second, to begin with prayer means that we get our own humanity in perspective. Every one of us comes away from some situation at home with which we are still at least partially involved. Perhaps we are thinking of the dirty dishes in the sink, the hassle we went through getting the children dressed in order to come to church, or the fact that the car was almost out of gas, the upsetting phone call we had earlier this morning, or whatever it may be. But when we come together and the service starts with the recognition of the presence of God, then somehow all those human problems pale. We begin to see them in the right perspective. God and his world, what we are doing with our lives, who we are, how we are intended to function -- all these begin to take on increased importance in our eyes when we come to church. That is what a church service is about.

I know that many Christians think they do not need to come to church, that they can worship God just as well by staying at home, working in the garden or watching the television. There is a certain degree of validity about that: God is not found only in church. But there is a reason why the Scriptures tell us, "not to forsake the assembling of ourselves together," {cf, Heb 10:25 KJV}. Somehow, when we come together and focus upon the greatness of God, there is a ministry to our own hearts that nothing else will convey. That is why it is important to keep up attendance at church.

Oftentimes the problems of life are solved by coming to church. We have a different perspective; we see solutions that we never saw before. This is the continual and frequent experience of the people of God. In the 73rd Psalm, the psalmist speaks of how he was having a difficult problem in his life for which he could not find the answer until, he says, "I went into the sanctuary," {Psa 73:17}. There he saw things in their proper perspective. So when the people of God come together, the first thing to be concentrated on is prayer and the recognition of God's presence.

Paul now goes on to list three forms of prayer and one form of praise:

1. First, he says, there are "supplications." This is a word which means, "the requests of the people." Every week we have prayer requests turned in here at PBC which appear on our Need Sheet. These requests reflect actual situations of people who are going through times of heartache, struggle, pain and pressures. These people are attempting to share these needs with us so that we can "bear one another's burdens and so fulfill the law of Christ," {Gal 6:2}. So when you read these requests, pray about them at home, alone or in small groups. God can oftentimes meet these needs through the agency of human beings.
2. Then the second category is "prayers." That sounds so general for us in the English translation that it does not help us much, but in the original language this is a special word that is only used for requests which God alone can meet. The first kind of requests, "supplications," are requests that we can get involved in. If you are praying for somebody who does not have enough food, the Spirit of God is very likely to say to you, "What about all that food you have in your cupboard? How about taking some over there this afternoon?" But all of us know that there are some requests that only God can meet -- somebody is heartbroken, somebody is suffering from some terrible experience he does not understand and nobody can explain it to him. Only God can meet that need. That is the kind of request Paul is talking about. We are to bring those before the Lord and pray about them together.
3. The third form of prayer is "intercessions." Again, this is a word that has other people in view. It means, "an intimate petition made by a friend to a king on behalf of someone else." This is a beautiful expression of corporate prayer, as a church. Because we are children of the King, we come to our heavenly Father and in the intimacy of that relationship we share with him special needs and special problems that others have. Thus, we "make petitions" on their behalf. When you pray together in this way, remember that, as the hymn puts it,

Thou art coming to a King,
Great petitions with thee bring,
For his love and power are such,
None can ever ask too much.

4. With this, Paul then links a form of praise, "thanksgivings." When we gather as Christians we ought to give thanks to God. Usually this is what we are doing in our hymns, and this is why the singing of hymns has always been an important part of the Christian's life from the very first centuries.

The words of hymns are usually either prayers addressed to God, or the expressions of praise, thanksgiving and adoration voiced in the hearing of the people. The hymn we sang this morning,

Fairest Lord Jesus,
Ruler of all nature,
O Thou of God and man the Son,

is a word of praise, of thanksgiving, out of adoration of the greatness of our Lord.

I would urge you never to sing a hymn in a mechanical way. Do not mumble the words without realizing what you are singing. It is sometimes amusing to look out on a congregation and see them singing things you know they do not mean. I have often thought, as we were singing the words,

"Take my silver and my gold
Not a mite would I withhold,"

"I wish they meant that! Then our financial problems would be over!" We ought not to sing something that we do not mean. Sometimes when I am singing a hymn, I will come across a sentence that I do not believe, so I will not sing it. Not because that makes any difference (nobody knows it but me), but I do not want to utter things that I do not feel. So when we sing we are to sing personally. Let the words be a form of thanksgiving expressed to the greatness of our God.

That is why I love some of the old hymns:

Amazing grace!
How sweet the sound
That saved a wretch like me!

Or,

And can it be that I should gain
An interest in the Savior's blood?
Died He for me, who caused His pain? For me, who Him to death pursued?
Amazing love! how can it be
That Thou, my God, shouldst die for me?

When a whole congregation sings that, it is a beautiful expression of praise, thanksgiving and adoration. That is what the apostle is seeking. He says, "When you gather together this is what your services ought to be like; that you sing and pray and praise God."

Paul now moves on to give us the objects of prayer. Who should we pray for in a congregation?

First of all, he says, "for all men" -- for everybody.

Then, "for kings and all who are in high positions." That is a very helpful word. It means we are not to ignore governmental leaders and politicians. We are to be ready and willing to pray for anyone. It is very important that we understand what the word "all" means here. (When it says, "all men," it does not, of course, mean just males. There is great controversy today about this. Some people want to change these expressions in the Bible to read, "persons," but that is to deny the usual expressions of language. "Men" in this case means "mankind," and always has meant that; it involves both the sexes. In this case, however, it might be proper to substitute the word "persons" -- "To pray for all persons.")

The stress is on the word *all*. This does not mean all mankind, without exception. We would never get through praying if we tried that. It means "all" without distinction, i.e., all kinds of people, all sorts of needs are proper subjects of prayer. This little word *all* appears four times in this passage, and in every case it means "all without distinction," not, "all without exception."

Then, among all these people, the apostle points out, we are to pray for kings. We ought not to forget our leaders. They may not be godly men at all, but still we are to pray for them. The interesting thing is that when these words were written the Emperor was Nero, one of the cruelest of Roman Emperors, who already had launched a bitter persecution against the Christians. Yet when

Paul wrote to Timothy in Ephesus, and told him what to pray about, he said not to forget to pray for the king, for Nero. This recognizes that all forms of government come from God's hand. We are taught that very plainly in Romans 13. That is why rebellion against government itself is always wrong. We may need to use the powers that are given to us in politics to change governments, but government itself comes from God. So these men and women in public office need our prayers.

Tertullian, one of the early church fathers who lived in North Africa at the close of the second century, gave us a list of some of the things he prayed for the Emperor:

- First, for long life;
- Second, for secure dominions;
- Third, a safe home;
- Fourth, a faithful senate;
- Fifth, for righteous people; and
- Sixth, for a peaceful world.

That is how the early Christians prayed for governmental leaders.

Then, we are to pray "for all in high positions," (Verse 2). This covers all the subordinate positions in government, down to the local level. This again is not a universal "all," but one without bias for all kinds of people, even those who are unrighteous and ungodly, even those who are cruel and vicious. They are, nevertheless, to be prayed for, that God will open their eyes and use them in ways that will bless and help and strengthen. God can use a wicked as well as a righteous man, as Proverbs reminds us: "The king's heart is in the hand of the Lord, as the rivers of water; he turneth it whithersoever he will," (Prov 21:1 {KJV}). In the Scriptures, Nebuchadnezzar, Cyrus the Persian and others are called, "the servants of God," even when they were being used to punish and persecute the people of God. That is why we are to pray for men and women in these offices.

This naturally leads us to the results we can expect from prayer. Paul puts it in a twofold way:

First, he says, "that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life, godly and respectful in every way." Did you ever realize that the peace of our community is related to the prayers of God's people? That is what this is saying. Lately we have been passing through a great period of violence. Attempts have been made on the life of the President and on the life of the Pope. There have been outbreaks of terrorism in various parts of the world. Some nations are on the verge of war. In this area we have been hearing of the capture of a vicious "trail-side killer" who, perhaps, was responsible for the deaths of as many as fourteen people in recent times. Every night the television has a continual report of murders, rapes, muggings and other violent actions. It may be that God is trying to tell us that the reason why we have so much violence is because we have not been praying for our public officials and our public life. Perhaps the words of James, "You have not because you ask not" {cf, Jas 4:2}, apply here.

Some of the young Christians who work in Vacaville prison tell me that the Christians there regard themselves as the control apparatus to keep the peace of that prison. When riots threaten or when violence breaks out in the prison, the Christian prisoners gather together and ask themselves, "What has gone wrong with us?" When discord is present among the Christians, they always expect, and almost always see, immediate restlessness in the whole prison. They have learned that God will keep the prison peaceful when the Christians are at peace, and in right relationship with him. That is a very significant confirmation of what the apostle is stressing here.

In fact, one of these men told me that some months ago the chief psychologist of the California prison system was asked by the Prison Board why was it that Vacaville prison had fewer riots and less trouble than any other prison in the state. The man said, "The only thing I can suggest is that there is a group of Christians up there who pray for Vacaville prison. That may not mean much to you," he said, "but that is what appears to me to make the difference."

This is what Paul is talking about. There is a direct relationship. We can lead quiet and peaceful lives when we are faithful in prayer for those who are involved in governmental matters.

Prayer also has an effect upon us. There is something accomplished outside of us because of prayer, but something is also accomplished inside of us when we pray. Paul tells us what it is. It is translated here by two words: "That we may be *godly* and *respectful* in every way." Both of those words are very hard to translate; it is difficult to find synonyms for them in English. I do not think that these two words, "godly," and "respectful," are very accurate translations. The first word is a word in Greek, *eusebeia*, which is really not used of "godliness" so much as it is used of "a consciousness of what is required in life with respect to God, to your fellow man, and to yourself." "Realism" would be a better word to use -- to live realistically, to pass through life knowing what is required in all circumstances, to understand the reality in which you live. This is one of the great things that prayer accomplishes. When you pray for the government, for the world, for your friends, for those in need, you understand more realistically than ever before what is really happening to them, why they act the way they do, what are the forces that are at work in society. To continue in prayer like that is to start to live with a sense of assurance, a quiet realization that you understand what is happening in life. That is what this word means.

Coupled with this is this word, *semnotes*, which is translated, "respectful." That is not a bad translation, but a better one, perhaps, would be "courteous," understanding that people are not the problem, they are the victims. So a second effect of prayer is that you become invariably courteous to people; you have a kind of graceful dignity with which you pass through life.

In reading Corrie Ten Boom's book, *The Hiding Place*, I have been impressed at the way her father conducted himself. (In fact, she has now written a book about her father.) When the Nazis came to their house, her father was as courteous to them, as he was to the Jews they were seeking. He knew that everybody deserves a sense of respect, because, if nothing else, all people are in the image of God. Again, this is the effect of realistic prayer for people.

The second thing that prayer accomplishes is that it fulfills the will of God. This is the way the apostle puts it:

This is good, and it is acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all, the testimony to which was borne at the proper time. For this I was appointed a preacher and apostle (I am telling the truth, I am not lying), a teacher of the Gentiles in faith and truth.
{1 Tim 1:3-7 RSV}

Paul is saying here that the prayerful life is good and acceptable to God because it is God's way of opening up men and women everywhere for salvation. "God is not willing that any should perish," Peter tells us {cf, 2 Pet 3:9}. Here, Paul says, "God desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth." So prayer is the first artillery salvo that opens up a territory to possess it for God. Thus, when we pray for people we can expect that they will hear truth that they have never heard before. We can expect that they will see things in a different way than they ever saw them before. Prayer does not change them immediately. It is not a magic wand. But there comes a gradual dawning light. The darkness disappears, and people start for the first time to understand their own nature, and the reality of life around them. This is in line with God's great purpose, for he desires that all men shall be saved. Here is a particular place where the word *all* has to be clearly understood. It does not mean "all without exception." It means "all without distinction," without bias toward anybody. All kinds of people might be saved. There are no human barriers to men and women coming to God. It does not matter what the color of your skin is, what your social class, your background, may be, your national origin or the state of your heart, how bad you have been, etc. Paul stresses that there are no distinctions. God desires all kinds of people to be saved.

The wonderful thing is that as you pray in this way, all kinds of people do come. I have been amazed at some of the people God has reached. I have prayed for people I never expected God to reach, but he did. There were others I never had any heart to pray for at all, but God reached them too. So God desires all kinds of people to be saved. There is no barrier in life to that salvation when the Spirit of God starts to draw.

The fact that this is the meaning of this word *all* is brought out by the apostle's argument here. This is what it means when he says, "For there is one God and there is one mediator and there is one ransom and there is one gospel." Paul brings that in because he is stressing the fact that despite all the distinctions that appear to be among men there is only one provision for their redemption: that is God. There is only one God. There is not a God for the Hebrews and another for the Gentiles. There is not a God for the Muslims and another for the Hindus.

After the first service this morning a woman said to me, "My husband is not a Christian. He tells me that his God is in him." I have heard this from many people: "I have my own God. Others have their God and you have your God." But there is not a million or a billion gods. The truth is that there is only one God: "One God and Father of us all." All mankind must relate to him, despite differences in our culture, our background, or whatever. There is only the one true God over all the earth.

And there is only one Mediator: the Man, Christ Jesus. The reason for that, of course, is his unique nature: Jesus is both Man and God. When you come to and follow that magnificent Man who obviously has solved the basic problems of life, you soon discover that you have also come to God. By coming to Christ you meet God. That is what the disciples discovered. They did not come to Jesus because they thought he was God. They believed it was blasphemy for a man to claim to be God. They came to him because he was such a glorious man. They saw him to be such a wonderful, wise teacher, a prophet, a marvelous man of God. But when the Apostle John laid his head upon the breast of Jesus and heard the beating of his human heart, somewhere along the way he realized that he was listening to the heartbeat of God; that in coming to Christ he had found the Living God. There is only One like that in all the world. Men everywhere, if they are going to come to God, must find Jesus. "No man comes to the Father but by me," said Jesus {cf, John 14:6}. Though there are many paths to Jesus, he is the only path to God. This is what he meant when he said, "Strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, that leads unto life, and few there be that find it," {cf, Matt 7:14 KJV}. Broad is the way that leads to destruction, but there is only one narrow gate for those who come to life, and it is through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Then there is one ransom: "He gave himself for all." Again, not universally, but without distinction. Jesus gave himself that all

kinds of people, from all walks of life, may come. He did not send a committee or a group of angels to do it. He gave himself. That is the glory of the gospel.

Finally, the apostle says, there is only one gospel,

... the testimony to which was borne at the proper time. For this I was appointed a preacher and apostle ..., a teacher of the Gentiles in faith and truth. {1 Tim 2:6b-7 RSV}

Again, all the distinctions have been eliminated. If you are going to come to God there is only one way to do it, by the gospel, the good news that Jesus is the way, that by his life and death he has found a way to God for us.

There is only one gospel, and Paul was its preacher. This is the nature of his work. He says he glories in this. And Paul was an apostle. That is the authority with which he spoke. He was appointed by Jesus himself to say these things. Paul was a teacher. That was the method he employed. He patiently worked his way through these great doctrines with people so they began to understand with their minds (as far as the mind will go) what great things God has worked out and how they fit life itself. He was sent to the Gentiles. That was the sphere of his ministry.

You and I are here this morning because Paul was the apostle to the Gentiles. How much we are indebted to this mighty missionary of the cross who awakened faith and revealed truth!

These were the results everywhere the gospel came.

This is where we rest our case this morning. When the gospel comes into your life, it brings you into touch with reality. The gospel reveals the truth. When you know that this is the way life really is, it awakens your faith, and you begin to act on what you have learned. That is where people find deliverance.

Everywhere this great gospel has touched people, through some twenty centuries now, they come

- Out of superstition,
- Out of violence,
- Out of degradation,
- Out of sexual immorality,
- Out of drunkenness,
- Out of drugs,
- Out of occultism,

and are healed. Wholesomeness comes in. Homes become happy. Hearts become bound together in love and truth.

What greater testimony could we ask for than the record of history of what the gospel does when it strikes!

A group of us who have been praying every week for the city of San Francisco have already seen that God has been answering those prayers. Teams of people from all over this area are planning to converge on San Francisco in the middle of August for a great outreach, a grassroots testimony. This will not be a crusade; no well-known speaker will be coming in. But six hundred or more of God's people will be walking the streets, telling people about a way out of all the heartache, the pressures and the problems that are destroying that beautiful city.

That is what the gospel is, and this is what the church is for. The gospel is set at the heart of life, and life will be healed when the church functions properly. The church is the key to life, the most relevant body on earth.

The church is the solution to the drastic problems that have baffled the minds of statesmen and others in our area. We hold the answer.

That is why God has called into being this most remarkable people called 'the church of the Lord Jesus Christ.'

Prayer

Lord, we pray that you will take our lives and make them count. Help us to obey what we have been sent to do and thus release the mighty power of God in our communities, in our homes, in our neighborhoods, in our groups together at work, wherever we are, that this ferment of the gospel may begin to touch lives and change hearts. We pray in Jesus' name, Amen.

Title: The first thing -- Prayer
By: Ray C. Stedman
Series: Studies in First Timothy
Scripture: 1 Tim 2:1-7
Message No: 5
Catalog No: 3768
Date: Unknown Date in 1981

ADAM'S RIB OR WOMEN'S LIB?

by Ray C. Stedman

We are approaching one of the major battlefields of Scripture, the controversial passage from Chapter 2 of Paul's first letter to Timothy. Many have fought and still are fighting over this section. We have to approach it with great care, and yet deal with it thoroughly. I want to remind you of one fact which we must hold clearly in mind: The subject under discussion in this passage, as well as in this entire chapter, is prayer. Paul is writing about the worship of the congregation when they come together, especially as that worship centers on and focuses in prayer. So the passage that touches on women and on their ministry among us grows out of that subject.

Paul has already given us a brief description of the different kinds of prayer. We have looked at his word on whom we should pray for, and the helpful statement he gave us about the results of congregational prayer. Prayer permits us to live peaceful and godly lives; it affects the community; it reduces violence, opens up understanding, and enables relationships to be developed. We must never forget that God has placed the Christian church in a very relevant position in the world regarding these matters.

Then, second, Paul tells us that prayer becomes an instrument for the salvation of all kinds of people. He says, God "desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth" (Verse 4). The word "all" means all kinds of men and women without distinction.

In Verses 8-10, the apostle continues on that subject of prayer, discussing the atmosphere in which prayer is to be made, i.e., the specific attitudes both men and women should have when they pray in a congregational meeting. This is what he says:

I desire then that in every place the men should pray, lifting holy hands without anger or quarrel; also that women should adorn themselves modestly and sensibly in seemly apparel, not with braided hair or gold or pearls or costly attire but by good deeds, as befits women who profess religion. {1 Tim 2:8-10 RSV}

When Paul says he desires that "in every place the men should pray" (Verse 8), he does not mean that only men should pray. In some denominations and churches this verse has been taken that way, so that only men are permitted to pray in public or to lead the congregation in prayer. But that is not what the apostle means. He is not saying that only men should pray, but that when men pray in every place they should do so in a two-fold way -- lifting up holy hands, and without anger or quarreling in their hearts. In other words, Paul's concern is not who prays here, but how they pray.

The first characteristic is that men should "lift up holy hands." That was the usual posture of prayer, derived largely from the Jewish synagogues, where the Jews prayed while standing with their arms lifted up, and led the congregation that way. All Paul is saying is that when men pray that way there ought to be two things that are characteristic of them:

- One, the hands lifted up should be holy hands. That does not mean that something religious has to be done to them -- that they should be sprinkled with holy water or something like that. Rather, this is a figure of speech which means that these men's actions, symbolized by the hands, should be right actions. These are men who ought to have a record of rightful behavior, who are recognized as honest, whose actions reflect their faith.
- Second, their attitudes toward one another must be "without anger or quarreling." Their relationships have to be right. They must not be bitter or resentful against somebody, angry about something that has never been brought out or discussed. Those are the ones who are to lead in prayer.

When I was growing up as a boy in Montana, we used to have Methodist services only once a month because there was no Methodist church in town. Each month when the service was held you could count on the fact that a lean, tall man would always lead in prayer. His prayer was anywhere from ten to fifteen minutes in length, Almost everyone went to sleep on him. But what made it worse was that he was widely known in the community as the biggest rascal in town. His sharp business practices had turned everybody off, so that his prayer was hypocrisy, and he was despised in that community as a hypocrite. All the apostle is

saying here in this verse is that when men pray in public they must live in private what they pray.

But Paul goes on to say also that women should pray. Now I recognize that the actual wording of this section about women does not say that they should pray, but this is part of the passage where Paul is dealing with prayer. He is designating how men should pray and how women should pray, so that the words, "should pray" (pertaining to women) are implied in the word "also."

That is really a very weak translation. The word in the original language is very strong. It is translated in some versions, "likewise," or "similarly," or "so also," "in like manner." The clear implication is, "in like manner, women are to pray." But, like the men, they too are to be characterized by godly lives, not merely outward display. So this passage clearly implies that as men are to pray with right actions and right attitudes, so likewise women should pray with proper and modest dress, and with a record of a life of good deeds.

Taken that way, this passage agrees exactly with what Paul says in First Corinthians 11 about women in the congregation. There he acknowledges that women could "pray and prophesy" in the church ("prophesy" means "to comment on the Scripture, to expound it") but they must have their heads covered as a demonstration of their agreement with the principle of headship. (This principle is discussed more fully there in that chapter in First Corinthians. It also comes in here in the words that follow.)

Paul is not trying here to regulate women's dress. If you read it that way you have misunderstood this passage. When Paul says women should not have "braided hair or gold or pearls or costly attire," he is not attacking the way women dress, except as it is a display of what their heart attitude was. God looks at the heart; he does not pay any attention to the outward man. But oftentimes the way we dress and the way we conduct ourselves is a vivid revelation to others around of what our hearts are like. So that if a woman comes with her hair done up in the latest fashion, wearing the latest low-cut dress and flashy jewelry, she is obviously not trying to get God's attention; she wants men's attention. Her choice of clothing, etc., reveals her heart. This is what the apostle is talking about.

Years ago I saw a woman come into our congregation who was really a sight. (It is one thing to call a woman a vision, but quite another thing to call her a sight -- and she was a sight!) She had on one of those revealing gownless evening straps; her face was heavily painted and her hair was done in the very latest coiffeur. It was obvious that her heart at that time was committed to keeping up with the latest styles. At least it appeared that way, but actually she proved to be hungry of heart, wanting something more. She came to Christ, and it was interesting to watch how, without a word from anyone, her whole behavior and dress changed, as it reflected what was going on in her heart.

On the other hand, some women have taken this word of Paul so literally that they have gone to the other extreme. They come to church frumpy and dowdy, in their dullest dress, with their hair hardly made up at all, or pulled straight back in a bun, with no lipstick or makeup on, and imagine that they are thus being pleasing to God. But actually, all they are doing is trying to attract attention too. They want to be known as "spiritual women," so they dress that way. But that is just as much a violation of this principle as any flashy dress would be.

It is not what happens on the outside that God is impressed with, rather, it is with the inward. Sometimes you cannot change the outward very much. (I heard Phyllis Diller say that she spent three hours in a beauty shop -- and that was just for the estimate!) Here the apostle is stressing the fact that a woman's impact, spiritually, in a congregation will arise out of the fact that her dress conveys that she is not seeking attention or trying to be sexy, but rather that her life of good deeds is making her respected by that congregation and having great influence among them.

Out of this discussion on church prayer the subject now very naturally turns to public teaching -- and especially the role of women in teaching. Having dealt with the matter of a woman praying (how she should pray and what will complement that prayer) Paul now says (Verse 11):

Let a woman learn in silence with all submissiveness. I permit no woman to teach or to have authority over men; she is to keep silent. For Adam was formed first, then Eve; and Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor. {1 Tim 2:11-14 RSV}

Here is the area of great controversy: "What part can a woman play in a church service, in its leading, its speaking, and its teaching?" According to this translation, women should be "silent" in church. That word occurs twice in this passage: that a woman should "learn in silence" (Vs. 11), and, she is to "keep silent" (Vs. 12). I have been in churches where this was taken so literally that women were actually prohibited from even saying "Hello" to anybody in the auditorium; they could not even open their mouths, literally, when they entered into the sanctuary or auditorium.

But that is obviously a very extreme and wrong translation. The reason I say that is because the same word that is translated "silent" here occurs also in adjectival form in Verse 2 of this same chapter. There we read that we are to pray for "kings and all who are in high positions, that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life." The word "peaceable" is the same word which is translated

"silent" here. But surely Verse 2 does not mean that we may lead lives of absolute silence. It clearly means that we are to live an undisturbed life, i.e., without a great deal of hassling, etc., but a "peaceable" life. That is a good translation for this word, which, if carried over here to this section we are studying, changes the thought entirely.

Furthermore, if you look at Second Thessalonians 3:12, the apostle uses this same word again. He says of certain persons who were busybodies, "Now such persons we command and exhort in the Lord Jesus Christ to do their work in *quietness* ." There is the same word which is translated *silent* here. Paul is not telling people to work silently but to be peaceful about it, to not make a big to-do about it, to work privately, without a lot of public notice. So when we read this translation in that sense, then all that Paul is saying is, "Let a woman learn in a 'peaceful' way; she is to keep herself 'peaceful' and 'peaceable.'"

What Paul is really talking about, of course, is her attitude. Just as he has all through this section, the apostle is dealing with the attitudes which men and women are to have when they pray. Women are not to have an attitude of argumentative aggressiveness, assertiveness, or stubborn insistence on having their own way or their own view recognized. Rather, their attitude is to be one of reasonableness, patience, and a willingness to listen to others.

Now when Paul says, "let a woman learn in peace [or peaceableness] with all submissiveness," he does not mean to imply that women are always and only to be the learners, while men are always and only to be the teachers. These are very artificial understandings of this verse. Rather, he means that when women are learners, they are to learn in a spirit of quietness -- as are men. But women are not always learners. We have a great many well-taught women in our congregation here, some of whom have learned a lot more than many men have. (In an ultimate sense, of course, all Christians are always learning and are always learners.) All the apostle means by this is that when women are in the role and position of learners, they are to do so without aggressive reaction and challenging in a loud and assertive way. (It may be that this reflects something of the cultural pattern of Ephesus. In those great Greek cities women often participated in government. They perhaps carried this over into the affairs of the church and were aggressive and vociferous about their points of view. This is what the apostle is correcting here.)

Verses 12-14, however, are the key verses:

I permit no woman to teach or to have authority over men; she is to keep silent. For Adam was formed first, then Eve; and Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor. {1 Tim 2:12-14 RSV}

As we have already seen, this is not an absolute prohibition against teaching. Paul does not say, "I permit no woman to teach, anywhere, anytime, to anyone, period!" -- although this passage has been taken to mean that. It is clear from other passages in the New Testament that women did teach. In fact, in his letter to Titus, Paul tells the older women to teach younger women how to love their husbands and rule their children, etc. So women were expected to teach. Also, there are instances in Scripture where women taught men.

One notable case was when Aquila and his wife Priscilla took Apollos, the eloquent orator of the early church, aside and instructed him further in the doctrines of Jesus. Priscilla is linked with her husband as one of those instructors. So clearly, women did teach. Paul is not saying they cannot teach, period.

The key to this passage is the word translated, "to have authority over." It governs both the teaching and the attitude of the woman. This Greek word, *authentain* , means "to domineer, to usurp authority, to take what is not rightfully yours," and to do so (is the implication) by the process of teaching. In other words, women are not to take over in a church and become the final, authoritative teachers.

It is true that this passage makes no mention of eldership, yet I think it answers the question that many are asking today: "Should a woman be an elder or a pastor of a church?" As far as the latter is concerned, it depends upon how you are using the word *pastor* . If you use it in a biblical sense, in which it means, "a shepherd of a flock," then women have been pastors for centuries. In every church there are women who teach Sunday School classes. A little flock gathers around the teacher, who is the leader, the guide and the guardian of that flock. In that sense she is a biblical pastor. But if you use that word in the conventional sense, in which a woman is to be the final voice of authority as to what the Scriptures mean (this is what Paul is talking about), in that sense a woman is not to be a pastor or an elder.

This interpretation of women as being excluded from eldership is confirmed by one incontrovertible fact: There were, in the New Testament, no women apostles and no women elders! Jesus could have settled this controversy at the very beginning by appointing Mary Magdalene as an apostle, but he did not do so. Neither Paul, nor any of the apostles, ever chose a woman to be an elder of the churches they founded, though they could easily have done so if it were right. There were many godly and capable women available, but none was ever put in the office of elder.

Many churches today are unbiblical in that they have a single pastor or a single elder in final authority. The churches in the New Testament knew nothing of that. They always had pastors (plural) and elders (plural). No one person was ever given a final voice

of authority. Elders reached unanimous decisions after much prayer and deliberation as to what the final teaching of the Scriptures meant. It is that role which is denied to women by the apostle here.

There are two reasons why. Notice that Paul does not take these reasons from culture, but from creation. This is a very important point. Many of the comments you read on this passage will make it appear that Paul is prohibiting women from this kind of authoritative teaching because of the cultural patterns of that day. That is not true. Paul says there are things that stem right from creation that are different about men and women, and which have application to this problem here.

One: "Adam was formed first, then Eve." That is all he says, but evidently that prior creation of man before woman is very important in his mind. In the account in Genesis it was obviously also important in the mind of God. He deliberately formed a male first and gave him a job to do before the woman ever came along. Adam may have been living for a considerable period of time before Eve was taken from his side and brought to him. The task Adam was given was to name all the animals, which means that he was involved in a research project. He had to investigate all the animals, because in the Bible names reflect nature. This was a long task, as there were many animals (later, the ark was filled with them).

So Adam had a large task at hand. How long he took we do not know, but we do know that while he was working at this task, he was looking for something; Scripture tells us he was searching. He noted that the animals came in pairs; that there were two kinds of each species -- a male and a female kind -- and that they seemed to belong together. He was looking for that for himself all through creation. When he had finished he had not yet found anything to correspond to himself.

At that point God performed the first surgical operation, complete with anaesthesia. He put Adam to sleep and took a rib from his side, made of it a woman, and brought her to Adam. The first word Adam said was, "At last!" (Men have been saying that about tardy women ever since!) But what Adam meant, of course, was, "Finally, I have found that which completes me, corresponds to me, is equal with me, is sent to help me fulfill the task which God has given me to do."

The implication the apostle seems to draw from this is not that men are always the leaders (because I do not think they always necessarily are), but that when they lead they are to do so in a certain "male" way, while women, when they lead, are to do so in a certain "female" way. The two complement one another, but that peculiar quality which is given to the male is that of initiation. That is why he was sent first into the world; he had something to do first.

The remarkable testimony of history is that males have a strange restlessness to discover, to explore, to climb to the highest mountain, to plumb the depths of the deepest sea, to get out into space, to find something. Very rarely do you find names of women among the great explorers of history. It is almost always men who do so, because that is their nature. Occasional individual examples of women who have an urge to explore may be found, but in general this is not true.

Paul carries that over into the church. He says, in effect, that in this realm of discovery, of investigation into the mind and the thinking of God, and the hidden mysteries of Scripture, the male is the one who is to make that initial venture. The woman is to be there to fulfill, to console, to comfort, to complete. Women do have a part in this, but in the ultimate role of decision making in the realm of theology the male is given this task.

Paul's second argument comes also from the difference created in nature. He says, "Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor." Paul implies that the reason woman was deceived was because her nature made her more vulnerable in this area.

We ought to remember that Adam was more culpable, he was a worse sinner than Eve, because, not being deceived, he still deliberately sinned, while Eve thought she was doing the right thing, something which would benefit her husband and herself. The apostle seizes on this as an indication of a difference between man and woman, suggesting that this is not a matter of inferiority at all, rather, it is just a difference.

It is the glory of woman that she is more responsive than man to what is around her. That is what makes life beautiful. How dull and cold and barbarous life would be if only cold-blooded men were here to confront the world of creation! Women add that quality of tenderness, softness, empathy, sympathy and comfort to the world. They add something that no man can give, and yet, because of that role in life they are prohibited from making final decisions in the church. Paul is not talking here about secular life. He is talking about the church and of this final role of investigation of the mind and thought of God.

The difference Paul is referring to is the difference between a knife and a fork. They do not perform the same functions, yet we use them at the same time while we are eating. But we do not insist that they be employed the same way. (Although some people do use knives to pick up food. I remember a little jingle that goes:

I eat my peas with honey,
I've done it all my life.
It makes the peas taste funny,

But it keeps them on the knife!

I have met people who do eat their peas with their knife, but that is not what knives are for; forks are for that.) Yet we do not get upset because people use their knives and forks in distinctive ways. We do not claim the knife is inferior to the fork or the fork is inferior to the knife. Neither should we with men and women. They are made to do different things.

Today, after a lot of discussion and controversy in this whole area, even secular thinking is coming around to recognizing that there are these distinctive, created differences between men and women.

What the apostle is saying, then, is that women are not given the role of final decision on doctrinal issues. They are not to be the authoritative teachers of the church. They are to teach, they are to pray, they are to prophecy. They can fill these roles in very helpful and wonderful ways since they have been given spiritual gifts the same as men; they can add ingredients and qualities that no man can give. But as for the final determiners of teaching, they are to leave this to the male, because a woman's empathy and natural tendency to respond is sensitive at this point. The major problem of the church, as we see in this letter, is to detect error and not to be deceived by it. We are up against a clever, skilled and ruthless Deceiver, who presents truth in ways that look right and real. Men can be deceived too, but the apostle's argument is that they women are less likely to be deceived than women.

Paul then adds this rather strange word in Verse 15:

Yet woman will be saved through bearing children, if she continues in faith and love and holiness, with modesty. {1 Tim 2:15 RSV}

That is a rather garbled version. Unfortunately, it is difficult to understand what was originally said here because the transmission is faulty at this point, and many of the scholars have argued over this.

There are two things we need to ask ourselves here: What is meant by the word *saved*? and, "What is meant by this reference to *bearing children* ?

If this latter means that women are promised to be kept safe through labor, then this is a promise that is not always fulfilled, because many godly women have died in childbirth. I do not think this verse means that.

The verse literally says, "She will be saved through the childbearing." Because of the emphasis of the article, some have taken this to be a reference to the virgin birth of Jesus -- that women will be saved through the childbearing that Mary accomplished when Jesus was born. It is possible that it means that, but again, this does not seem to be very significant, because if that is true, what else is new? Everybody is saved that way. There is only one Savior. Paul just said so in Verse 5 of this chapter: "There is only one mediator between God and man." Why should Paul single out women and give particular attention to them if both men and women are saved through the One who was born of the virgin? (Strictly speaking, of course, we are not saved by his birth, but by his death and resurrection. That is the gospel. Paul has said so in Verse 6 of this same chapter: "Christ Jesus gave himself as a ransom for all.") No, I do not think that is the meaning of this verse at all.

This does refer to bearing children, but what we need to understand is the word *saved* : "She will be saved through bearing children." Now surely that does not mean that a woman is actually regenerated when she has a child. I could point out a lot of women who are not regenerated who have children; their lives give ample testimony of that. No, we must understand that the word *saved* is used in a different sense than usual here. It does not mean "regenerated," or "born again." It is being used in the sense in which it is also used later in this letter about Timothy himself. In Chapter 4, Verse 16, the apostle says:

Take heed to yourself and to your teaching; hold to that, for by so doing you will save [the same word] both yourself and your hearers. {1 Tim 4:16 RSV}

Timothy did not need to be saved in the sense of regeneration because he was already regenerated. Nor could his hearers be regenerated by Timothy's obedience to the faith, because that would be salvation by works. That cannot be the meaning here.

Here the word *saved* means "fulfilled," "to find significance." When used in that same sense, in this word about women, it makes perfect sense. Paul is saying to women, "The role God has given you is not to be the final, authoritative teachers in a church" (that is clear), "but that does not mean you cannot find great significance as Christian women. Your significance, your sense of fulfillment, will come as you bear children and they continue in faith and love and holiness, with modesty."

The interesting thing is, that is exactly what the Greek text says: It says, "they," not "she." It is the editors who have put in the word, "she." Everywhere, in every version, the Greek text says, "they." It refers to the children. It is simply recognizing that a mother's unique contribution to life is to pour herself and all her values into her children, in order that as they come to manhood and womanhood they touch life and change it because of their mother's helpful influence. The old proverb,

"The hand that rocks the cradle rules the world"

is still true -- both for bad and for good. Abraham Lincoln's famous quotation about his own mother, "All that I am or ever hope to be I owe to my angel mother," is apropos here. She died when he was just a boy, but the impress she made upon his life influenced him throughout his career.

Now Paul is not addressing this passage to non-married women. There are other passages in Scripture which deal with the subject of how a single woman can find fulfillment and significance. Even in that case it involves, oftentimes, qualities of motherhood for women are the mothers of the world. It is a quality that they alone possess. Men cannot do this. It is denied them, just as this matter of making authoritative pronouncements on the final meaning of Scripture is denied to women. Each has his or her own role.

These are differences before God.

When those differences are observed in love and respect and recognition of each other's unique and equal contribution to the value of life, life is joyful and filled with peace and effectiveness and good influence. That is what the apostle is talking about.

The impact of the church upon the world comes about when men and women walk in the character and in the conduct that God has prescribed for them.

Prayer

Thank you, our Father, for the great practicality of Scripture, for the insights it gives us into the nature of our lives. Give us obedient hearts that quickly and readily respond to what you say, hearts that do not argue, fight and resist, but know that your great loving heart has chosen for us, both men and women unique contributions which the other sex cannot make but which are necessary to life and its fulfillment. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Title: Adam's Rib or Women's Lib?

By: Ray C. Stedman

Series: Studies in First Timothy

Scripture: 1 Tim 2:8-15

Message No: 6

Catalog No: 3769

Date: Unknown Date in 1981

THE LORD'S LEADERS

by Ray C. Stedman

There is a wide spectrum of titles used for leaders of churches in this country. The Baptists have deacons; the Presbyterians have elders; the Methodists have stewards, bishops; Episcopalians have rectors and vicars (whatever they are); and the Catholics say that priests ought to be in charge. Many denominations refer to their leaders as ministers. As I was thinking of that, I wondered whatever became of the word *parson* ? It has been a long time since I heard anybody called a parson, although that used to be common in this country. (That is where the word "parsonage" -- the house the parson lives in -- comes from.)

Regardless of what title may be given, when you turn to the Scriptures you discover that the whole subject is very simple, because there were only two designated leaders in the early churches -- elders and deacons. This passage out of the third chapter of Paul's first letter to Timothy deals with that subject of leadership and sets before us these special leaders.

Elders are called "overseers," or, as it is translated in the passage, "bishops." But these are not bishops in the ordinary, accepted sense of the word, i.e., men with mitered crowns and robes, etc., who are denominational managers of many churches over widespread areas. That concept of a bishop is never found in the New Testament. There, bishops were elders, overseers, appointed to watch over the congregation. As such, the apostle here instructs Timothy on how to recognize these men by giving job descriptions of bishops and of deacons. Chapter 3, Verse 1:

**The saying is sure: If any one aspires to the office of bishop, he desires a noble task.
{1 Tim 3:1 RSV}**

The striking thing in this paragraph is that the very first emphasis the apostle wants Timothy to make at Ephesus about this subject is that the office of an overseer or an elder is a very important and significant role, not to be taken lightly at all. Paul calls it, "a noble task."

There are several reasons why Paul calls it that:

First, the appointment of elders in a local church is the Lord Jesus' own provision for leadership in the church. This is not an invention of man. Too many churches today are being operated like business corporations, or country clubs, run for the benefit of their members, electing their own leaders according to democratic procedures. But in the New Testament you never find that at all. There you see that it was Jesus himself who set up the structure of leadership. He is the Head of the church. As such, he has designated the kind of leaders and the function of leaders within the church.

In the New Testament it is clear that the church began with our Lord himself. The church was born out of the blood and the death of Jesus; out of his wounded side was given to us the opportunity to become a part of his life. So the first thing about the church that marks it as distinctive, beyond everything else, is that it shares the life of Christ. Every member born by the Spirit into the church is filled with the Spirit of Christ. If you share the life of Jesus, you have a distinct kind of human life that is not available from any other source or in any other way than by faith in the Lord Jesus. So the church emerges from Christ, born of his blood, filled with his Spirit.

When our Lord, after his resurrection, sent the disciples out as apostles, he instructed them to lay the foundation of the church. Paul refers to himself in First Corinthians as a "wise master builder [who] laid the foundation," (1 Cor 3:10). That foundation was the teaching concerning the work and the person of Jesus. "Other foundation can no man lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ," (1 Cor 3:11 {KJV}). It was the apostle's task to proclaim these radical and distinctive doctrines about Jesus which define and guide the church in its development. That is why the Scriptures came into being. The Scriptures are the apostolic testimony of what Jesus Christ was like and is like in the midst of his church today.

When you read in the book of Acts about the early church in Jerusalem, you discover that the apostles were the elders, the first human leaders of the church. Early in that book we are told that there arose a problem in the church (Acts 6). This matter was brought to the apostles, who urged the church to appoint seven men to serve as a solution to the problem of distributing the food to the widows. But the apostles said on that occasion that their own task was two-fold: "We will give ourselves continually to prayer, and to the ministry of the word" {Acts 6:4 KJV}, i.e., to discover the mind of the Lord.

As the church began to spread, at first the apostles tried to keep up with it. Churches began in other places -- in Judea, in Samaria, and a great awakening broke out in the pagan city of Antioch, in Syria. The apostles traveled to these places to see if they could set the churches in order, direct their expansion, etc. But they soon discovered that the church was growing faster than they could ever travel around. So, led by the Lord Jesus himself, they began to appoint elders in every church. These were appointed, oftentimes, out of congregations that were made up of brand-new converts, people who had come to Christ out of a pagan background. But after a year or so of watching them, the apostles would return and appoint elders. They did not have the congregation elect them. The apostles appointed elders or they sent representatives, such as Timothy and Titus, to appoint them.

The task of these elders was, basically, one primary thing: Like the apostles in the church at Jerusalem, their whole task, as they conceived it, was through the ministry of the Word -- teaching, preaching, studying, learning the Word of God -- and, through prayer, they were to discover the will of the Lord Jesus who was Head of the church, who was present in every church and ready to direct its activities through the Spirit of Christ.

When Jesus sent the disciples out into the world in what is called "the Great Commission," he said, "Go into all the world, preach the gospel to every creature, {Mark 16:15 KJV}; "and, lo, I am with you ..., even unto the end of the age," {cf, Matt 28:20b KJV}. That is the great and exciting fact that the churches of our day have largely forgotten. In church after church that I visit, I detect very little consciousness that people think of Christ as being a living Lord in their midst; that Christ is still in his church, ready to direct its activities which will challenge the culture of the day and explore the great possibilities that arise as the changing circumstances of men's lives create hunger for deliverance from bondage, slavery, degradation, heartache and misery. It takes a living Lord in the midst of his people to direct the activities of the church, and the elders are the human instruments for the divine direction of the church. They are the means, the channels, through which these innovative, surprising approaches to life, which the Lord in his church knows about, are carried out and brought into being through the body of Christians who meet together.

I hope it is clear to all of you that every Christian is in the ministry. The moment you became a member of the body of Christ you are in the ministry, and you are given gifts for ministry. It is not the elders who are to do the work of the ministry: You are!

You are directly related to the Lord Jesus so that he can say to you at any time, "I have opened up a door here in your neighborhood for you. I want you to reach these people." That is the way the Lord works.

Elders are to be watching for this. That is what the word for elder, *episkopos*, means -- "looking over." Elders are to be looking to see what the Lord is doing with his people, and utilizing the opportunities that arise on every hand. They are to be instructed in what the Lord has said in his Word so as to be able to guide this new and exciting thing that is coming into being, correcting it if need be. That is the work of elders. So it is a "noble task," as Paul says.

To be an elder is to be, in a sense, at the control board of the most dramatic and exciting thing going on in any day, at any time, because the church, in God's estimation, is the most important body in the world. God has set the church at the center of life. He has given us the opportunity to control the level of morality around us, the openness of people to hear and respond to his Word. To be given a position as one of those leaders through whom the mind of Christ is revealed and who is able to encourage and train the people of God to fulfill the ministry Christ has given them is surely a very exciting and noble task.

Elders, as individuals, have no special authority. No elder can be a "boss" in a church. Churches that allow pastors to become tyrants and dictators fail to fulfill the New Testament pattern. No pastor or elder is to be alone, individually, given any kind of authority. Elders are ordinary Christians, just like everyone else. They are brothers; they are not in command. But they, corporately, as a body of elders, are to meet together to seek the mind of the Lord. They know they have succeeded when, in the most remarkable way which only God could bring about, they agree together about what the Lord wants done. It is the Lord's task to so lead them through all the problems and difficulties and personal resistances of their own individual personalities to a sense of harmony and union, of unanimous agreement together. Then they have found the mind of the Lord for that church -- not for other churches -- only for theirs.

That is what makes churches exciting bodies to be in, because the living, innovative Christ who holds society in the control of his hand, who opens doors and shuts others, is directing the activity of that body of people and is in their midst. That is what a church is. So surely, eldership is indeed a noble task.

Only the Lord can bring about that kind of unanimity. I have often thought of that passage in Isaiah 11:6, where the prophet predicts a time to come, when "the wolf shall dwell with the lamb, ... the cow and the bear shall feed together, and a little child shall lead them," in reference to our Board of Elders. We have a man on the board who is like a lion -- bold and powerful and very confrontational. People are a little afraid of him at times. We have another one who is like a bear. He is very powerful; he seems to engulf you. We have another one who is like a wolf; (In fact, that is his name -- Jim Wolfe.) We have one who is like a leopard -- slinky -- he pounces on you suddenly. And here I am, an innocent lamb in the midst of all these! Only the Lord can make the lion lie down with the lamb and the cow and the bear feed together. This happens in a wonderful way. As we share, talk, pray, think, study, and observe together what God is doing, and evaluate it according to his Word, we discover a quiet unanimity appearing, as the Lord leads us together. That is what eldership should be.

I tell you, that is exciting work! There is nothing I covet more than the work of serving as an elder in a church like this, where the culture is rapidly slipping into decay, bondage, hurt, and misery. Our church, with others, is set here with the possibility of freeing people by the mighty power of the gospel of Jesus Christ. What a noble task!

The apostle goes on to give us the guidelines in two areas for that task:

First, he gives us the certain character qualities by which you can tell who the men are whom the Holy Spirit is selecting. The congregation does not select elders; the Holy Spirit does. He chooses men in every congregation and develops within them the character qualities needed, leading them through various experiences to train them. The job of the other elders is to keep alert and see who it is the Holy Spirit is putting his hand on. First, there are these qualities of character necessary (Verse 2):

Now a bishop must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, temperate, sensible, dignified, hospitable, an apt teacher, no drunkard, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, and no lover of money. {1 Tim 3:2-3 RSV}

Those are the things you look for:

- First, an elder's reputation. He is to be above reproach. That does not mean he must never have had anything gone wrong. If that were so none of us would make it. It means that when something did go wrong he had handled it rightly, he dealt with it openly, giving every indication of desiring to be a godly, righteous man, above reproach.
- Second, he is to be a "one-woman man," literally. It says, "the husband of one wife." This sounds like he is to have been married only once. Many have struggled over this passage because sometimes elders' wives die and elders remarry, or elders are divorced for some reason and remarry. This has given rise to a lot of controversy. But the word basically means that an elder is to be a one-woman man, i.e., not a philanderer, not attracted to every skirt that walks down the street, not constantly eyeing somebody or someone else's wife. It is to be very evident that an elder is committed to one woman, his wife, whom he loves.
- A third requirement is that an elder be known for a number of good habits he has formed:
 - First, he is to be "temperate." Basically, that means to be calm. He is not to be flighty or nervous, constantly

jumping from one thing to another.

- He is to be "sensible." (The basic root there is self-control.) Again, a kind of inner peace governs him; a discipline of life keeps him level and steady.
- An elder is to be "dignified." The word really means "orderly," to have an orderly life, not to have everything going helter-skelter, unable to lay his hands on anything and not knowing what is happening.
- He is to be "hospitable." His home is to be open to strangers and to the people of the church.
- An elder must be able to teach. That is a very important requirement. There are many godly men in a congregation who fulfill these character requirements but they may not have the gift of teaching. But an elder must teach. He must be able to expound the Scriptures, to correct those who are misusing them and recognize error when it appears -- "confute those that are antagonists," as Paul wrote to Titus {cf, Tit 1:9b RSV}.
- An elder is not to be a "drunkard." The word is, "not given to much wine." That answers all the strange stories you hear among Christians these days claiming that the wine of the New Testament was nothing but grape juice. If a man were only drinking grape juice why would the apostle be concerned that he "be not given to much grape juice"? The grape juice he was drinking was obviously able to be intoxicative if used too liberally. The fact that our Lord and the disciples did drink wine was a common experience in that day. But it was not to be over-indulged; there was to be no reproach in this area.
- Another requirement is that an elder be "not violent," i.e., not a contentious, angry man who is always attacking others. That disqualifies a man for eldership.
- Then he must not be "quarrelsome." The word really is "stubborn," not insisting on his own point of view at all costs.
- Finally, he must not be in it for what he can get (not a "money lover"). He must not be out to keep up with the Joneses, but must maintain a simple lifestyle, without undue affluence evident.

Then an elder has to have a certain record of accomplishment in three specific areas.

First,

He must manage his own household well, keeping his children submissive and respectful in every way; for if a man does not know how to manage his own household, how can he care for God's church? {1 Tim 3:4-5 RSV}

The first thing you look for is whether the man has a well-managed family. Look at his children. Are they obedient, or are they the scandal of the church, nobody can control them? I know that pastors' and elders' children are under more inspection than others. (They get that way from playing with the children of the other members of the church!) But his children are to be obedient and courteous in their responses, learning how to address life. This does not necessarily govern the children after they have grown up and left home. The word used here is "small children." This is a test of a man.

This does not mean he is not to have any problems ever come in his family, Nobody can be free of problems. It is the devil's job to put us in trouble and give us problems. What this urges us to observe is how he handles those problems. Does he evade them by busying himself in his business, or does he tackle those problems? The text says that this is excellent practice for being an elder in a church. An elder must not run from problems or refuse to face them. He must learn how to deal with them, and how to work things out in love and grace.

The second thing the apostle mentions is that an elder,

... must not be a recent convert, or he may be puffed up with conceit and fall into the condemnation of the devil. {1 Tim 3:6 RSV}

The trouble with a recent convert is that, though he may be very earnest in his new-found life and desirous of following the Lord with all his heart -- and oftentimes the new convert is beautiful in the dedication he manifests, his willingness to walk with the Lord as best he knows, etc., -- yet there is one thing wrong with him: He has not yet learned the effect of the cross upon his self-life, his ego. He is still reckoning upon human resources to bring him to success; he is still counting largely upon his personality, his magnetism, his good education, his good looks or his keen, sharply-trained mind in order to achieve what he thinks God wants. He has not yet learned that great word of Jesus: "that which is highly esteemed among men is abomination in the sight of God," {Luke 16:15b KJV}. He has not learned that God says he wants to work with people of a humble and a contrite heart, who have learned not to exalt themselves. A new convert means well, but he cannot be trusted because he has not yet learned to put down self and to trust in Christ. If he is put in office, the sudden exposure to public leadership will puff him up and make him proud, arrogant, and conceited. He will fall into what Paul calls "the condemnation of the devil," i.e., the very condemnation the devil himself has achieved by his pride and arrogance.

If I was not aware of the totally malicious nature of the devil, I confess there are times I would feel sorry for him because he is always losing at the last minute. He gets everything looking like it is going to work, and then everything falls apart, and he is

left with dust and ashes. The cross is a good example. The devil thought he had beaten God when Jesus of Nazareth was dead, that by the power of death he had defeated the purposes of God to redeem a lost race, but by the resurrection all of that fell apart. The devil learned that what appeared to him to be his greatest victory was, in fact, his most terrible defeat. This is what happens with a new convert when you put him in a public position too soon. Suddenly, all of what looks like hard work and promotion that he has brought together to accomplish something will all fall apart because God will not use the flesh to bring about success in his kingdom.

Then the last area:

... moreover he must be well thought of by outsiders, or he may fall into reproach and the snare of the devil. {1 Tim 3:7 RSV}

An elder must have a good reputation in the eyes of others. I remember years ago visiting a druggist here on the Peninsula. I mentioned to him a man who was attending this church, and the druggist spoke very disparagingly of him. "Why do you say that about him?" I asked. He replied, "I know that man. He goes to your church, but I know more about him than you do. He has owed me money for six months and he has never paid a dime. I've got no use for him." I was a young pastor and I did not know quite how to handle that, so I just watched. Within a few weeks, that man who apparently had a position of respect among us suddenly fell apart. We discovered that he had fallen into a very serious moral problem. He fell into the "snare of the devil," the trap of the devil, because he had no respect in the eyes of the community. Thus, he was opened up to the devil's clever wiles.

This is what accounts for many of the leaders of today who are falling into moral difficulties, falling into the trap of the devil, because they have allowed their consciences to be offended and have not dealt honestly with the world around.

Last week we were treated to the humiliating spectacle of a former Secretary of Agriculture standing before a judge and confessing that he had misused funds and evaded taxes. I do not know whether he is a Christian or not, but here is an example of the type of thing that can happen when our reputation in the eyes of the world is not what it ought to be.

There we have the qualifications for the leaders of the church. What a task it is, for the church of Jesus Christ is the most exciting body on earth! To be in the center of leadership in the church of Jesus Christ as the human channel by which the mind of the living Lord in our midst is revealed to a body of people about what they can do and how they are to proceed is indeed an exciting relationship, a noble task.

Let us pray for our elders; let us keep them before the Lord. They are under great attack because the devil (twice mentioned in this passage) is very much out to get elders. If he can destroy their faith, and break up their homes, the whole church will be affected. God's program, God's counter-revolutionary movement, as a result, will be weak.

Prayer

Our Father, grant to us that we may be faithful to obey and heed what you have set before us; to walk in ways that are pleasing to you and to honor you for the designation you make of certain men as leaders among us.
We pray in Jesus' name, Amen.

Title: The Lord's Leaders
By: Ray C. Stedman
Series: Studies in First Timothy
Scripture: 1 Tim 3:1-7
Message No: 7
Catalog No: 3770
Date: Unknown Date in 1981

THE LORD'S SERVANTS

by Ray C. Stedman

I find much confusion today, even here at PBC, about who the leaders of the church ought to be, and what these terms, elders, deacons, and pastors, mean. Anne-Marie Ritchie was telling me yesterday that when their son Roddie was about eight years old or so, at school one day he was asked to write down what his father did. Roddie wrote, "My father is a rabbi, or a priest, or a minister, or something like that." Ron is still trying to figure that out!

When you come to the New Testament, however, there is no confusion as to what the prescribed leadership of the church is to be.

The Apostle Paul's first letter to Timothy gives specific directions of what the elders are to do and what kind of men they are to be. Elders are to know and to seek the mind of the Lord, to guide the burgeoning ministry of the congregation as it develops, in direct inspiration of the Spirit of God, as each one in the congregation finds what the Lord wants him or her to do. The elders are to oversee that, to guide it, to correct it, if need be, along the lines of what the Scriptures teach and what the Spirit of God has led them to understand as they seek the mind of the Lord in prayer.

In the passage from First Timothy which we will be looking at this morning, Paul now turns his attention to the deacons.

In this section, beginning with Verse 8 of Chapter 3, we are going to try to understand what makes deacons "deek."

Deacons likewise must be serious, not double-tongued, not addicted to much wine, not greedy for gain; they must hold the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience. And let them also be tested first; then if they prove themselves blameless let them serve as deacons. The women likewise must be serious, no slanderers, but temperate, faithful in all things. {1 Tim 3:8-11 RSV}

It is very striking that, in the passage on elders, the apostle said nothing about women, for in the New Testament churches there were no women elders. It is obvious that the Lord himself chose no women apostles. There are reasons for that, which Paul has already dealt with that in this letter. But when he comes to deacons it is clear that Paul includes women in this ministry. We will say more about that when we come to that verse.

All the scholars agree that this function of deacon in the early church arose from the quarrel over the distribution of food, described in the sixth chapter of Acts. There were two language divisions in the church at Jerusalem -- the Jews who spoke Greek because they were born in Greek-speaking communities, and those who spoke Hebrew (Aramaic was the actual form of it). There was a murmuring among the Greek-speaking Jews who had become Christians, because they said their widows were being neglected in the daily distribution of food. It is interesting that the early church did not depend upon any kind of community supply for needy people in their midst, but took care of this directly themselves by a daily distribution of food to widows. Food stamps had not been thought of yet, so they handed food out directly to those in need.

The Greek-speaking widows, however, felt neglected. They brought the problem to the apostles, who told them to choose out from among them seven men (for whom they gave certain qualifications) who were to handle this problem -- "but we [i.e., we apostles, we elders] are to give ourselves continually to the ministry of the Word of God and to prayer, seeking the mind of the Lord," they said {cf, Acts 6:4 KJV}. Thus arose the first evidence of the work of deacons in the church.

Here are the three qualifications the apostles laid down for those deacons: they were to be men of good reputation, well-known for their character in the congregation; they were to be filled with the Spirit (i.e., they were to have a biblical view of life; they were to understand the revelation of life that the Spirit of God had taught, and thus be spiritual-minded men); and third, they were to possess the gift of wisdom (they were to know how to apply the truth of the Word of God to specific situations. That is what wisdom is). These men were obviously appointed to serve the church. Thus, deacons are to serve the church and their Lord by handling the practical problems of administration, of distribution, of finances, whatever may be the problem within the church. As for the deacons in Acts 6, they were chosen by the congregation and confirmed by the elders. But essentially, they were the church's helpers, not the servants of the church; they were the servants of the Lord, but they were serving the church, doing for the many what would be difficult for individuals to do for themselves.

In our church here we have many who serve as deacons. I am sorry we have never developed the habit of calling them deacons; I think we should do so. But regardless of what they have been called, there have been many deacons, both male and female, in this congregation. For instance, the ushers who seated you this morning are serving as deacons in this congregation. They assist us in the orderly carrying-on of a meeting. They help you find seats. They turn on and off lights, open doors, solve problems and watch out over the congregation to see if anyone needs any particular kind of help. They serve voluntarily, willingly, and repeatedly, Sunday after Sunday, without thanks or without recognition, and they do so, "as unto the Lord." They are deacons, and we ought to be very grateful for them.

Right now, out in the nursery, there are attendants who give themselves regularly to the ministry of taking care of your children so that you might have free time to listen to the message and not read the bulletin, etc. They too are ministering as deacons when they do that. That is not always an easy task. (By the way, there is a Scripture verse that describes the work that goes on in the nursery: "We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed"! This is what is happening in the nursery right now.) I am always very grateful for those who are willing to serve as deacons of the church, freely and voluntarily, in the nursery. We have had some remarkably faithful people who have done so for years without any public recognition.

Those who take the collection and count the money are also deacons of this church. When the money is taken back here it is not dumped into a sack and handed to the staff (as some of you suspect!) but it is accounted for and deposited in a bank. Though they are never recognized publicly, those people who do that are deacons. Those who keep the books for us are deacons. For years we

had a faithful couple, Ed and Lydia Mason (they have both gone to be with the Lord now), who kept the books for us and never charged a dime for it although that work took hours of their time. Thus they served faithfully in the office of deacons of this church.

All who serve on committees are deacons. If you are on the building committee, or the maintenance committee, or if you served on the committee that planned the Family Faire, that is the work of a deacon. Those who prepare the communion for us do not say anything about it, but the communion table appears regularly. They are serving as deacons. Our organists, our pianists and others who play so faithfully Sunday after Sunday are not paid; they are deacons. The woman who makes the banners which decorate the auditorium so beautifully serves as a deacon of this church. So there are large numbers of people who are serving in that capacity. We do not have a board of deacons as some churches do. I do not think there was such in the early church. Deacons were volunteers who took on specific assignments of service in order that the congregation might be able to conduct its services and its ministry in helpful and wonderful ways.

The apostle now gives us certain qualifications for deacons:

First, the men: They are to be "serious, not double-tongued, not addicted to much wine, not greedy for gain." These are personal qualifications.

- We have looked at this word "serious" earlier in this letter. It means to be a realist, not to be a dreamer who chases after rainbows, not one who is easily influenced, but one who sees life realistically and handles it that way.
- Deacons are not to be "double-tongued." That is an interesting word, Those of us who grew up on the Lone Ranger and Tonto remember that every now and then Tonto used to say. "White man speak with forked tongue." That is exactly the idea that this word has -- a tongue that says two things, one thing to one person and another thing to someone else. Those people, male or female, are not to be deacons in the church. Deacons are chosen because they are believable people. They are not given to pleasing people by saying things that differ from person to person. They are straightforward, honest-speaking people who tell the truth.
- Third, deacons are not to be "given to much wine." We have already commented on this with regard to elders. It is clear that the wine involved here did have the possibility of being intoxicating, so it was not to be indulged in very much. Deacons are not to be winos or alcoholics in any degree at all, or to give themselves, even occasionally, to excessive use of wine. They are to be moderate and temperate in this regard.
- Fourth, they are "not greedy for gain." The best term for that today is, they are not to be "wheeler-dealers," always looking out for a fast buck, always out to take advantage of situations to gain some more money. This applies especially to those who handle the finances of a church. Every now and then you read in the newspapers a scandal about people -- sometimes even pastors -- who misuse church funds. This is definitely to be recognized as a temptation to those who handle the congregation's money. So it is especially to be observed that deacons are not "greedy for gain." Some checkup is to be made along that line.

Like the elders, deacons are also to have a track record of certain things they have demonstrated. There are three of them here:

- First, "They must hold the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience." "The mystery of the faith" is an unusual term. It means, of course, the Scriptures, the whole revelation from God. A mystery is not something mysterious in the New Testament so much as it is something that is revealed only to the initiated; it is not something everyone understands. This is surely true of the Scriptures. The world rejects the Bible, laughs at it, ridicules it, and says it is a fanatical book that does not deal realistically with life. But we who have come to know the Bible, know that is not true. It is the world that is confused and dealing unrealistically with life. The Bible sees things the way they really are. So a deacon should be one who has understood the Word of God, who holds it and believes it himself.

Notice that this does not say that a deacon has to teach, although there is nothing wrong with a deacon being a Bible teacher. In fact, among the first seven deacons mentioned in Acts 6, Philip was an outstanding evangelist, and Stephen was a mighty prophet; they were good teachers of the Word. But a deacon is not required by virtue of his office to teach. Elders are. Elders have to be teachers of the Word of God. Deacons are to "hold the mystery of the faith."

- Second, deacons are to hold it in "a clear conscience," i.e., they practice what they preach; they believe it, and they behave accordingly. That standard of practical behavior is necessary.
- Then third, deacons are to be tried out first: "Let them also be tested first; then if they prove themselves blameless let them serve as deacons." Obviously, this means in some kind of an initial assignment, when one is watched to see how he does. The reward of service is always more service. That is the problem, isn't it? Some of you who have been asked to do things, did well, so you were asked to do something else. But we are not to look on that as punishment. It is a privilege, rather, to serve the church of Jesus Christ, a privilege to live for the Lord. We are all called to be servants of Christ. To be given opportunity to do more is a great privilege. So, "let them also be tested first." If they do well, then they are to serve as deacons. This seems to imply a longer term of service, perhaps over a period of years.

The apostle now turns to women deacons. It is true that this word "women" here can mean the wives of the male deacons, but I do

not take it that way, largely because there is no corresponding treatment of the wives of elders in the preceding passage. If Paul was concerned about how the wives of the deacons behaved, he would likely have been concerned about the way the wives of the elders behaved, but he does not say anything about them. I take this, therefore, as a reference to female deacons.

In the 16th chapter of Romans there is a woman, Phoebe, who was called a deacon by the Apostle Paul (not a deaconess, although that is the word used in our English translation, for there is no word for female deacon.) Phoebe, Paul says, was a deacon of the church at Cenchræa, which was the port city for the city of Corinth. Serving as a deacon in that congregation she had been a great help to the Apostle Paul himself. So here we have women deacons.

There are four things that should characterize them:

- First, they too are to be "serious." This is the same word which was used to describe the men. Women deacons are to be realistic people, not dreamers following after rainbows, not given to visionary tasks, but people who deal realistically with what life presents before them.
- Second, they are not to be "slanderers." Literally, in the original language, the term is, "she-devils." Women are not to be she-devils. I am not going to ask you how many she-devils you know, but this is an interesting term. It refers to women who were given to the practice of gossiping and slandering the reputations of others. I know that men can do that kind of thing too, but women probably have more opportunity to do so because men are involved in work away from their homes, while women oftentimes gather together in their own neighborhoods so it is easy for them to talk about people. Care must be exercised, therefore, in choosing women deacons. They must not be known as wreckers of reputations, slanderers, she-devils.

I have known for a long time about a congregation in another state which had a continual record of unrest in the church. The pastors and the board of elders were always at odds with one another. Nothing seemed to work out, and that church's whole ministry was hindered for long years by a continual series of trouble and unrest. Recently it was discovered that the wife of one of the elders had for years been deliberately telling lies about the leaders of the church, planting innuendoes in people's minds, and constantly undermining the ministry of the church. No one realized it because she was so clever, so subtle about it. But finally it all came out that, for years, this one person had been wrecking the ministry of an evangelical church, which is in an influential situation, by her slander of individuals in that congregation. That is exactly what the apostle is talking about here. A woman is not to serve as a deacon if she is a slanderer.

- Then third, women deacons are to be "temperate." Here again is a word about their drinking habits. It also includes other habits such as eating, perhaps, or even work. Some people are workaholics. Somebody told me the other day that in the office of a workaholic you will see the sign, "Thank God it's Monday!" Some people can give themselves to work so much that they can destroy themselves. Women are to be temperate in that regard as well.
- Then the last qualification is that they are to be "faithful in all things." They are to be responsible, trustworthy individuals; having been given assignments, they will carry them through. Thank God we have a great many such women in our congregation. I could name a whole long list of them, and we are grateful for them. They serve in many capacities; they labor so willingly and so beautifully behind the scenes, doing things for which the whole congregation ought to be grateful. The apostle later points out that their service will produce that kind of gratitude.

Paul closes with a general word of instruction, both for the males, and for male and female deacons alike.

Let deacons be the husband of one wife, and let them manage their children and their households well; {1 Tim 3:12 RSV}

Clearly, that is addressed to male, married deacons. If they are married, they are to be, literally, "one-woman men." That is not really insisting that they be married, because Paul himself was not married, nor was Timothy, as far as we can tell at this point. Deacons are to be men who, if they are married, have their eye only for one woman. (We have also seen that with regard to the elders.) Deacons also are to manage their children and their households well. If they have families, you can tell a lot about deacons and their ability to function in the congregation by the way their households are run; whether they face the problems that may come, how they handle them, etc. All this is to be taken note of when people are chosen to be deacons.

Finally, the last word here is:

... for those who serve well as deacons [male or female] gain a good standing for themselves and also great confidence in the faith which is in Christ Jesus. {1 Tim 3:13 RSV}

Two things will result when the service of a deacon is done in a rightful way:

- First, it will create a great sense of appreciation on the part of the congregation -- deacons will have "good standing for

themselves." Their own ministry will be widely received and appreciated. We ought to be careful to be aware of all those who are serving us as a congregation, and, every now and then, there ought to be some way of recognizing them. I am delighted that in recent days, we, as a congregation, have taken on sending those who have faithfully served us to Hawaii for a couple of weeks. We did that with one couple. We sent two other couples to Carmel as a gift of appreciation from the congregation. It is right that we should give thanks, and not take for granted those who so diligently and faithfully serve us week after week after week. They are not being paid, they are not hired to do this work; they are volunteering it in the name of Christ. That should earn for them a great sense of appreciation on the part of the congregation.

- But the second thing Paul says is most interesting. He says that deacons earn for themselves, "great confidence in the faith which is in Christ Jesus." The word is really, "boldness." When you serve the Lord with all your heart in whatever ministry he gives you, especially if it is on behalf of the whole congregation, you develop a wonderful sense of God at work with you helping you solve problems, and this creates a deep sense of boldness.

I have in my hand a remarkable paper which was given to me a few Sundays ago by a deacon of this church who works in one of the major industries of this area. Without knowing that I was going to preach on this theme at all, he shared this with me. I then took the liberty of sharing with the rest of the elders an experience he had at work that confirms what this passage is talking about.

This man said that he began to realize that if Jesus was Lord of his life, he was not only Lord at church, and in his Christian relationships, but he was Lord of his life at work and could work through him at his assigned tasks just as freely and abundantly as he did in any church-related matter. So he began to lean on the Lord at work, expecting God to help him to think of insights and aspects of his work that others, perhaps, would not see. He found it was true that the Lord did help him to see things others did not see. He found that he had, in a sense, an edge on the others because the Lord of Glory was enlightening his mind and heart to see things about his work that others would pass by.

He was given a special assignment to evaluate a certain kind of work, and noticed things about it that indicated weakness. He saw another way to do something, but the project had progressed to the point that it was difficult to expect the management to change. But when he presented his conclusions he found that the Lord was with him. To his amazement, against great opposition, the management did change. They scrapped the other program and went ahead with his. Out of this, this man says he came to a conclusion that a three-mode plan was at work. He said,

1. I would inherently have the knowledge needed for the situation at hand.
2. It would have been placed in my consciousness to look into, just prior to need, what information would be required, and my part was to listen and act no matter how irrelevant the action seemed at the time.
3. Someone would be ready in a presentation audience to volunteer additional information I might need for clarification of a conclusion.

Then he says,

What reassurance! It was coming through that I could operate with a special sense of knowing the Lord was interested and active in each circumstance. The result was a new feeling of security and boldness for the conception of and selling of rather audacious departures from the conventional. This was not foolish boldness, but based upon liberation from haunting concern over critical eventualities.

That is an outstanding testimony to what Paul is saying. When you serve the Lord, in any capacity, you gain from God; and it is promised here that those who serve as deacons in the congregation will gain great boldness in the faith. What a wonderful promise, and how adequately and fully it is confirmed by this testimony!

Prayer

Thank you, Father, for the practical quality of your Word. How it deals with such simple and yet practical matters! Teach us to be faithful ministers of the gospel of grace; to depend upon you in all things, reckoning upon your wisdom imparted to us. Thank you for that possibility. And now may the grace of our Lord Jesus and the love of God our Father and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit go with each of you. In the name of Jesus, Amen.

Title: The Lord's Servants
By: Ray C. Stedman
Series: Studies in First Timothy
Scripture: 1 Tim 3:8-13

Message No: 8
Catalog No: 3771
Date: Unknown Date in 1981

GOD'S CHOSEN INSTRUMENT: THE CHURCH

by Ray C. Stedman

I flew out of Denver, Colorado, to Peoria, Illinois, a few years ago. Not very many people go to Peoria, but I did, and I flew on Ozark Airlines because I wanted to get there the worst possible way! In the plane I picked up the little magazine that every airline has. My attention was caught by an advertisement on the back page that said in large letters, "When you understand that you can change the world, your life will never be the same again." Naturally, I was curious to know what it was that would make such a dramatic difference. Reading further, I saw that it was an advertisement for *Playboy* magazine. That irritated me a little at first, but then I thought that it is really true: *Playboy* magazine has changed the world.

A few weeks ago we had Brad Curl here with us. He told us how the *Playboy* mentality has brought immorality and open, recreational sex into public approval and this has absolutely changed the mores of this country. He also documented for us the things that the advertisements about *Playboy* never mention -- the terrible increase in teenage pregnancies, the sexual abuse of children, pornography directed only at children, etc. The result of all this mentality is that we are sacrificing our children upon the altar of our lusts.

Yet, as I was thinking of that, I thought, what a wonderful slogan for Christians: "When you understand that you can change the world, your life will never be the same again." You can change it, for the better -- that is the point.

I was in San Antonio just this last week for the dedication of the new buildings for Bible Study Fellowship. The dedication speaker was Dr. Francis Schaeffer. He, more than any other man in our times, perhaps, has become the prophet of our day, speaking to us in prophetic voice. He was weak from his struggles with cancer -- though it is in a stage of arrest at this time -- but he delivered a tremendous message to us about the Word of God. In it he made this statement, "The greatest creativity ever given is the ability of men, by their choices, to change the course of history." God gave man that creativity. That is the great dignity of humanity. The power to change the world -- that is what the church is here for.

We pick up that theme today in our study through First Timothy, beginning with Chapter 3, Verse 14. The Apostle Paul had left Timothy to take care of the church in Ephesus -- the city which I consider to have been the Los Angeles of the ancient world. (I have often said that San Francisco is the Corinth of the modern world, but, if that is true, then Los Angeles represents the Ephesus of the modern world.) Ephesus was the second largest city in the Roman Empire, the center of commerce, culture and beauty in the Empire. Its most prominent feature was the Temple of Diana, a temple dedicated to the worship of sex. In that city, given over to vulgarity, license, and sexual immorality, a church had been established for a number of years, and Timothy was sent to correct conditions within it.

The apostle has already reminded Timothy of the need for strong, clear, biblical teaching to counteract the widespread error in this church. Timothy is given careful instructions on public worship, with prayer and preaching playing a central part. He is also given practical guidelines on identifying the leaders whom the Holy Spirit chooses in each congregation, and how to bring them into the place of service and leadership that the Spirit intends.

In Verses 14 and 15 we have marvelous words from the apostle concerning the church itself:

I hope to come to you soon, but I am writing these instructions to you so that, if I am delayed, you may know how one ought to behave in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and bulwark of the truth. {1 Tim 3:14-15 RSV}

As we look at these words together, I hope we will see how far removed Paul's view of the church is from the disparaging, often contemptuous view of the church prevalent all around us today.

I read the other day a contemporary poem, written about the church:

Outwardly splendid as of old;
Inwardly sparkless, void and cold.
Her force and fire all spent and gone,
Like the dead moon she still shines on.

A lot of people today think the church is an anachronism, a hangover from the past, with nothing to say to the present hour. It is nice for people with a religious turn of mind, they think, but it has absolutely no contribution to make to the real problems that we wrestle with in the world.

I hope that is not your view of the church.

It certainly was not Paul's, because he makes clear that the church is a tremendously significant body.

Do not be misled by the phrase in Verse 15, "that you may know how one ought to behave in the household of God," as if these are regulations on the behavior of Christians in church services. If that were the case, one would expect a list of do's and don'ts to follow, such as, speak in low tones; sit quietly; stay awake; pay your tithes promptly; don't criticize the preacher, etc. But that is not what Paul is saying.

The church is not a building, or a meeting in a building, despite the common idea that the church has something to do with a building.

One of our scribes told me this week that he asked the owner of a coffee shop on this block the question, "What do you think of the church?" The man made a face, and said, "To me the church is nothing but a great big dark building."

Many people would agree with that.

Much has been made of buildings in connection with the church. The current issue of *Christianity Today* has an article on the effect of stained glass windows and various styles of architecture on worship. But the New Testament has absolutely nothing of that at all. In the book of Acts it is impossible to tell what kind of buildings the early Christians met in. Nothing is said about these buildings except the fact that one young man fell out of a window, having gone to sleep under Paul's preaching! There is no emphasis at all upon buildings, however.

I am not saying that it is wrong to have nice buildings. I appreciate the changes that have been made in our own auditorium here recently. But buildings are secondary or even tertiary as regards the nature of the church. The church is not a building: The church is people. Wherever those people are, there you have the church; and whatever work they are doing is the church at work. That teaching pervades the New Testament, and we need to come back to it strongly today. You will never find any concept of a church in the New Testament other than the fact that the church consists of people who have been born by the Spirit of God and have entered into a new lifestyle because of the presence of Jesus Christ in their midst. That is the church.

In this connection, I want to say a word about a subject that has always troubled me. Every now and then we hear mention made of "parachurch" ministries to describe organizations like Young Life, Campus Crusade, The Navigators, Wycliffe Translators, etc. I do not like that word, "parachurch." I think it is an invalid word. It refers to those organizations which are made up of Christians -- everybody knows they are real Christians -- but nobody quite wants to acknowledge that they are a church so they call them parachurch ministries. To me that reflects the ignorance that often prevails among Christians as to the biblical doctrines of the church. The Holy Spirit came only to build the church. He does not build parachurches, he builds churches, and people involved in those ministries are the church at work. They are as much a part of the body of Christ as those who gather in the local building on the corner. This is the church. We need very much to recapture that emphasis.

When Christians got together in the 1st century it was always a choice and valued experience. You cannot read the book of Acts without seeing how they loved to get together -- in small groups, large groups, wherever, whenever they could -- because in such gatherings they began to sense in fresh and beautiful ways the reality of who they were and what had happened to them.

The Apostle Paul uses two descriptive phrases here to tell us what that was. He calls the church, "the house of God," which suggests intimacy and warmth, a family gathered; and then he calls it, "the church of the living God," which suggests excitement and power. That was what the church was, and is; that is the nature of the church.

We have largely lost our consciousness of what it means to be "the house of God." We have been so brainwashed by this sub-Christian concept that a building is the house of God that we have forgotten what the real house of God is. The temple and the tabernacle in the Old Testament are both called "the house of God," but it is made clear even there that they are only symbols of it. On that great day when the temple was dedicated, Solomon in his prayer said:

"Behold, the heaven and heaven of heavens cannot contain thee; how much less this house that I have built?" {cf, 1 Ki 8:27 KJV}

Though God filled the temple with the symbols of his presence, nevertheless it was nothing but a symbol of the house of God.

What is the real house of God? When you read about the tabernacle in the wilderness you see that it was the place where God

dwelt among his people. It must have been an impressive sight to come up over the brow of a hill and suddenly see laid out before you the whole camp of Israel, 2,500,000 strong, gathered in tents around that central point, the tabernacle. There in the center of this great camp was this corral-like enclosure containing a rectangular building with a cloud, which flashed with fire by night, hanging above it. Within that tabernacle there was a holy glory, a strange, mysterious radiance that crept under the curtain that veiled the holy of holies, and made people feel a sense of awe and respect that God dwelt there. Yet, according to the Bible, that was but a symbol -- a vivid symbol -- but it was not the true house of God.

In the epistle to the Hebrews in the New Testament we are told, in the third chapter, that Moses served faithfully in that tabernacle as a servant in God's house, but Christ (the counterpart of Moses) serves as the Son in his house. Then come these electric words, "we are his house," {Heb 3:6b}. We are the house of God -- we Christians, we human beings, we are the true dwelling place of God. Does that do anything to you? God lives in us. In this decadent age the place to find God is in church, where the church is at work, where the people of God are. We are the house of God.

That is why, when we gather together in places small or great, like our gathering this morning or in smaller groups -- and especially when we set aside times to praise the God who lives within us -- we ought to do so with hearts that are moved by the marvel of this truth. God is our intimate friend. God dwells with us and lives within us. When we sing, we sing praises to the wonder and glory of that truth:

And can it be that I should gain
An interest in the Savior's blood?
Died He for me, who caused His pain?
For me, who Him to death pursued?
Amazing love! how can it be
That Thou, my God, shouldst die for me?

That is what we sing about; that is what we praise God for when we come together.

That Thou shouldst so delight in me
And be the God Thou art,
Is darkness to my intellect
But sunshine to my heart!

We are the intimates of God. The amazing dignity conferred upon us by the Lord of Glory himself is that each of us individually is filled with the Spirit of God, bearing the glory of God. When we gather together, the sense of that increases dramatically. We ought to be bowing in wonder and praise before the God who consents to dwell among his people. We are the house of God, the intimates of God.

The gathering of Christians is not only a time to rejoice in that intimacy of fellowship, however, for, as Paul goes on to say, we are "the church of the living God." That phrase was probably intended as a direct contrast with the temple to a lifeless idol, the Temple of Diana, which won Ephesus fame all over the Roman world. A strangely-shaped meteorite had fallen from the sky and superstitious pagans had seen in it some faint resemblance to a woman. They built a temple around it, calling it, "Diana of the Ephesians," and began to worship it. A lifeless piece of rock was the central glory of Ephesus and an object of worship throughout the Roman world.

But Paul says we are not like that. We do not have a powerless, impersonal God. We are in touch with "the living God." That suggests dynamic, and it ought to be a reminder to us that God himself is at the heart of life. This world does not and cannot function without the continual supply of life, vitality, and energy from the God who reigns over it all -- the living God. All the thrust and commerce of life is a result of his activity. As Paul said to the citizens of Athens, "In him we live and move and have our being," (Acts 17:28). Every human being in the world draws every breath by the grace of God. That is the God we serve -- the living God!

The remarkable thing is that the church is his instrument for change. He will not use anything else. He has committed himself to this body of people called the church of Jesus Christ. No matter how weak they may be, because of ignorance or refusal to understand and act upon what they are, God will never propose any other scheme to do what he has come to do in this world. It is no use trying to set the church aside. God will never permit it. He is committed to the church, so do not ignore the church. He is going to work through it, and only through it. As Jesus announced right at the very beginning, "On this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it," (Matt 16:18). He guarantees that to be the case. That is the church.

The potential for dramatic change that is present in every gathering of Christians is simply beyond belief. As I travel around, speaking to many different congregations, I am often amazed by the failure of Christians to know who they are, and what they can do:

- Every church gathering has within it, first, a silent, invisible power unlike any other power known to man. This power

is absolutely unavailable to any secular source, but is the most dramatic and powerful force ever turned loose among men. It is called resurrection power. It does not make any display; it does not seek any propaganda or any support from outside sources; it does not need it. It does not rely upon money, though it can marshal great quantities of money if need be. The Scriptures teach us we have it: "according to the power at work within us," {cf, Eph 3:20}. Every Christian gathering has that power.

- Every Christian gathering also has new and uniquely individualized equipment that the world knows nothing about, called spiritual gifts. We all have them, every one of us. Spiritual gifts are given to us to build a dramatic new kind of lifestyle that keeps us alert and on our toes, expectant of what God is going to do next. Under pressure, under bombardment, under attack, yes, but never bored because God is at work through us.
- Every congregation is promised wise and pervasive guidance that knows its way through life, that understands opportunities, channels and doors to open that we have no idea even exist, but to which we will be led if we expect the Spirit of God to work in our midst to guide us. You cannot program it; you cannot anticipate it or build a five-year plan to incorporate it because you do not know what God is going to do. But the book of Acts is dramatic proof that God will work in that way.
- Every Christian congregation likewise is supplied with powerful and nonviolent weapons -- faith, hope, love, prayer, righteousness -- all these things. These are marvelously powerful means of attacking the social issues of our day and doing something at the gut level, the grass roots level, so that the problems not only are solved, they are in a sense dissolved; they start to disappear. That is the way the church is to work.

Nothing is more frustrating to me than to see the people of God, who are equipped with such wonderful possibilities, setting them all aside as though they were nothing. They then borrow the weak and futile approaches of the world to try to wrestle with these problems in the same old, tired, useless ways. Why do that, when we are "the church of the living God"?

Paul describes the role of the church in two dramatic words: the church is the "pillar" and the "bulwark" of the truth. The great reason for the existence of the church is to introduce truth back into a world saturated with error, with fantasy, a world that follows will-o'-the-wisp ideas that are paraded and exalted as though they were the acme of knowledge and wisdom. We live in a confused world and it is getting more confused all the time. In fact, if you are not confused it is because you are not thinking clearly! The church is called upon increasingly to speak the truth in the midst of that confusion, to point out that the Emperor does not have any clothes on, and to speak things that everybody thinks are heresy and radicalism because they are so different from the confusion of the society around us.

The church is the pillar and ground of the truth. You all know what a pillar is. The ancient temples had great pillars, several feet thick, supporting them. That is the idea: The church is the support of the truth. The uniqueness of the church is that it has been made by God the dispenser of the missing secrets that make human life function as God intended it.

These secrets are never found in secular authorities and writings. That is why every age makes the same mistakes, and every age repeats the same pattern. The world looks like it is going to go somewhere but it always ends up wrestling with the same terrible problems, generation after generation, world without end. The church is called on to shed light on that confusion; to teach people who man is, and what is his relationship with the living God.

Everywhere, on every side, you find people hungry for this. The cry of the world is, "Who am I?" "I've got to be me!" "I need to find myself."

It is to answer that poignant cry that the church has been sent into the world. The church is to tell us who we are, and what God has made us to do. The church is the pillar and the ground, the support, the defense, the bulwark and the buttress of truth. The church recovers truth when it is lost. That is why all moral recovery in a nation always begins with the church, with the people of God.

Any hope that we in this country will ever recover from this downhill slide into degradation and despair lies in the presence of the church in our midst.

But that also highlights the tragedy of an untaught church, a church that does not realize what it really is. In traveling around this country -- which in my judgment probably has the best taught churches of any country in the world -- it is shocking to realize that, for the most part, we have a biblically illiterate church in America. People do not know the Bible. It is not being taught; it is not being unfolded before them in useful and compelling ways. People are being given surface truths that everybody knows; Sunday morning messages become a parade of the obvious which everybody understands anyway. Little challenge is given to understand and see what is producing the world in which we live, and how vital it is that we function as God intended us, so that the world might be changed, and liberty and beauty be released into human society once again.

So the church is "the pillar and bulwark of the truth." The Apostle Paul understood that. He knew that the church was sent into the world to make a difference. He exhorted Timothy in this letter to help the Christians in Ephesus understand the mystery of their own being, and to understand that central mystery which we will take up next in the passage that follows immediately after

this, the mystery of godliness -- the central mystery of faith.

God grant that we may learn again who we are and what, under God, we can do.

Title: God's Chosen Instrument: The Church
By: Ray C. Stedman
Series: Studies in First Timothy
Scripture: 1 Tim 3:14-15
Message No: 9
Catalog No: 3772
Date: Unknown Date in 1981

THE CENTRAL GLORY

by Ray C. Stedman

This morning we recited together the Nicene Creed, which came from the fourth century. We joined with the confession of faith of Christians from those struggling days of the church, when they were hammering out on the anvil of controversy the theological viewpoints and teachings of the church. But in the passage from the third chapter of First Timothy, which we will be studying today, we are looking at a single verse that comes right out of the 1st century, clear back to the very beginnings of the church. Many scholars feel this verse constitutes a confession of faith which the early church recited. In fact, because of the rhythm of its phrases, the scholars think that this was sung as a hymn.

The Apostle Paul has reminded Timothy, whom he left in Ephesus, of the awesome possibilities of a church that exists in the midst of a pagan and sexually-degraded society. Paul said that the church is "the household of God," "the assembly of the living God" (Chapter 3, Verse 15). By that, Paul clearly indicates that God dwells among his people. They are the channel for the release of the power and the life of God into the world. No other channel is possible; God has chosen his church, his people, for that purpose.

In the same verse, Paul goes on to say the church is "the pillar and bulwark of the truth." That is, it is the business of the church to tear down the illusions men are seeking to live by, to show these illusions up for what they are, and to open men's eyes to the realities of life. A church that is doing its work is a church where realism is coming into focus again, whose people are facing life the way it really is. That is the business of the church.

In one verse the apostle goes on to give us the very heart of that truth, the central fact around which everything else is built. This verse contains the key truth of the universe. Nothing is more important than this; it is the ultimate foundation of knowledge and wisdom, expressed in this ancient hymn from the early church.

First Timothy 3:16:

**Great indeed, we confess, is the mystery of our religion:
He was manifested in the flesh,
vindicated in the Spirit,
seen by angels,
preached among the nations,
believed on in the world,
taken up in glory. {1 Tim 3:16 RSV}**

Do not miss the way the apostle underscores the importance of this great truth: "Great is the mystery of our religion." Every one of those words is significant. When Paul says it is a great mystery, he does not mean that it is hard to understand. We might say today, "Women are a great mystery; we men cannot understand them." By that we mean women are difficult and obscure, hard to comprehend. (Whether you agree with that or not, that is an example I chose to use.) But that is not what Paul means when he says, "This is a great mystery." He means it is of supreme significance; it is basic truth; nothing is more important than this.

But it is a mystery. That does not mean a riddle you have to puzzle over. As we have seen many times already, this word "mystery" is used in the New Testament of an insight into reality that is hidden from secular wisdom. The secular mind does not understand this mystery. It is something only revelation makes clear, so it will never be part of man's compendium of knowledge. You will not find it elucidated in any encyclopedia of human discovery; it is not to be found in our great universities, by and large, except as it is introduced by the church. It is a mystery, a secret about life, that is hidden from the secular mind and made known only to believing hearts.

Yet this mystery is the answer to the puzzles of life. Anyone alive today knows that there are obvious gaps in men's knowledge that keep us groping in darkness, unable to solve our problems. That is why every generation deals with the same dilemmas over and over again. Hegel's dictum, "History teaches us that history teaches us nothing," is true. We review the past continually, but never learn from it.

The reason is that we are missing elements of truth about ourselves, about God, and about the universe; and those missing elements are found only in the pages of Scripture. That is what makes the Bible the most important book in the world. There is no book like it, ever, anywhere. Nothing reveals this truth except the mind and will of God through the Spirit of God. This is the heart of that mystery. So it is indeed the great mystery, a significant and important truth.

The third word the apostle employs is that it is "the mystery of our religion," as this translation has it. That word, "religion," is a very poor translation. The same Greek word appears again in Chapter 4, Verses 7 and 8, where it is translated *godliness*: "Train yourself in godliness; for while bodily training is of some value, godliness is of value in every way, as it holds promise for the present life and also for the life to come." That is a better translation than "religion." Religion does not help anybody. Religion is man's faltering, fumbling search through the darkness to find something beyond himself, something greater than himself, that he can believe in. Religion is nothing more, and never has been any more than that.

Godliness is something greater, ("Godlikeness" is the English root of the word.) But that does not really convey what this word means either, for actually, the name of God is not part of this word at all. It is not *godliness*; it is *goodliness*. Goodliness is what Paul is talking about. The closest English word we could use to translate this is the word *wholeness*. This word has the thought of balance about it. William Barclay says that the word in Greek means, "a consciousness of what is due both God and man"; living in such a way that you are aware of what life requires of you.

Every human being in this world wants to be a whole person, wants to "get it all together," we say. We want to find all the elements possible within ourselves and put them together so they function properly, and we become whole persons. The secret of wholeness -- that is what Paul is talking about: "Great indeed is the revelation of the secret of wholeness."

Paul goes on to tell us what that secret is: It is Jesus. It is not a philosophy, it is a Person. That secret is Jesus himself: "He was manifested in the flesh." (Some versions have the word "God" there: "God was manifested in the flesh." It is difficult to know which word was used in the original writing. Some manuscripts have "God," some have "He," and some even have the word, "Which." But it does not make any difference, because the noun that it refers back to is, "the living God." Notice that in the previous verse: "The church of the living God" ... "He was manifested in the flesh.")

In this hymn we have six unfoldings of the mystery of Jesus, what it is that is unique about him. The hymn divides into three couplets of two verses each. These are contrasting truths about Jesus, a mixture of the visible and the invisible that contains the secret of his perfect life. Let us look at them in that way.

The first couplet is:

**He was manifested in flesh,
justified in spirit,**

I have taken out the word "the" -- manifested in the flesh, justified in the spirit." They do not belong there; they are not in the Greek and there is no justification for having them there. I have also changed the word "spirit" from a capital to a small "s." The translators evidently thought this meant the Holy Spirit, but I do not think so. Also, I have changed the word vindicated to justified, because that is the common, ordinary word that is translated justified throughout the rest of Scripture.

What the hymn says is that Jesus was outwardly manifested in flesh and inwardly justified in spirit -- his human spirit. "Manifested in flesh" means he appeared as a normal human being. Jesus was not different than us. He entered into life as we do. He knew the joys of family life and the restrictions of hard work; he knew what it meant to lose a loved one because his father, evidently, passed away. He knew what sorrow, pain, poverty, rejection and separation meant. He understood life.

Jesus appeared in flesh, real flesh, just like yours and mine. You are I are here in flesh (some more so than others). We do not mean that in the bad, theological sense of the word *flesh*, but in actual meat and bones. We have bodies that are subject to reactions, to pain, hurt, joys and sorrows, and so did Jesus. He was a normal human being. That is what this means. He ate and slept just like we do; he discharged the wastes of his body the same way we do. He even bled and died and was buried like a man.

Within Jesus, however, was a hidden glory that kept breaking out in remarkable ways that arrested the attention of those who knew him. Somebody has used the phrase that Jesus "had a daily beauty which made us ugly." That is what attracted people to Jesus. John speaks of this:

The Word was made flesh ... full of grace and truth; we have beheld his glory, glory as of the only Begotten of the Father. {cf, John 1:14}

That was the glory in Jesus -- grace (compassion, love, mercy), and truth (reality that did not deceive itself in any way, but dealt honestly and forthrightly with life).

This is what is meant by the phrase, "justified in spirit." We are being given here the secret of the inner life of Jesus. The word "justified" means the same thing here that it means in Romans 5:1:

Being, therefore, justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.

Justified is what is true of us, and it was also true of Jesus. It means, "made righteous." There was a continual witness being borne to the spirit of Jesus that he was righteous before God. That means he was fully accepted and acceptable to God. He was loved and cherished and desired and looked after with deep affection and concern. That was the secret of his serene and untroubled character. That is what kept him calm and panic-proof in the midst of all the pressures and dangers in which he walked.

The reason this truth is so remarkable, and why it is incorporated in an early Christian hymn, is because that is true of us as well. We, by faith, are justified in spirit. Jesus was justified in spirit in reality; he did nothing wrong. The Spirit bore witness to him at all times that he was acceptable to God: "This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased," {Matt 3:17, 17:5, Mark 1:11, Luke 3:22}. But the wonderful good news is, we are justified in spirit by faith. We too are acceptable to God, loved and cherished, so that as God looks at us he says, "This is my beloved child in whom I am well pleased." That is what keeps us serene and untroubled, calm and able to keep our cool under pressure, danger and disaster. That relationship remains absolutely unchanged despite our behavior. That relationship was the secret of the life of Jesus.

The second couplet says,

[He was] **seen by angels,
preached among the nations**

Once again, here is a blending of the invisible with a visible reality. Jesus was "seen by angels" (nobody could see that happening), but, "He was preached among the nations" (that was visible everywhere).

The word "seen," as it is used here, is the word from which we get our English word, "eyeball." Jesus was eyeballed by the angels. They watched him all the time. They studied him; that is the idea. He was constantly under observation by angels.

The record tells us that angels were present at his birth. They sang when a tiny, scrawny baby was laid in a manger in a cold and dirty cave. How their eyes must have reflected the incredible aspects of that situation, that the great God, the Lord of Glory, should be born as a baby in a manger! They were with him to strengthen him at his temptation by the devil after those forty days of fasting in the wilderness. They went with him through his ministry. They were there with him in the agony in the Garden of Gethsemane, watching as he sweat drops of blood in his physical agony. They stood guard at his tomb. They stood beside the disciples as they watched him ascending into glory; and they sent the disciples back into Jerusalem, their hearts burning with hope again of his return.

The angels knew his majesty, his power, and his greatness, but they did not know his forgiving love. How amazing it must have been to them to watch their great God acting as Jesus did! They watched the cross with incredible eyes. They knew the critical issues that were being worked out in that death grapple in the darkness with the powers of hell and evil. Out of it, at last, they watched as there came a triumphant message to be sent out to all the nations; that the stranglehold of evil in human hearts was broken by the death of Jesus and his resurrection from the dead; that in Jesus there is a place of release and relief and recovery. That is the good news that has gone out through all the world.

We often sing:

There is a fountain filled with blood
Drawn from Emmanuel's veins;
And sinners, plunged beneath that flood,
Lose all their guilty stains.

That is the message preached, not by angels, but by pardoned men and women who triumphantly bear witness to the redeeming grace they themselves have experienced. That is why these two truths are put together; angels learned, but men are sent to tell the story.

I remember an old hymn that we used to sing when I was a new Christian:

Holy, holy, holy, is what the angels sing,
And I expect to help them make the courts of heaven ring.
But when we sing redemption's story, they must fold their wings,
For angels never felt the joy that our salvation brings.

Only men can preach this gospel throughout the nations. What a privilege it is to be a part of that great proclamation that has been going out to all nations! This proclamation is no longer confined to the narrow limits of Judaism and Jewry, but now to every nation on earth is given the tremendous promise that in Jesus Christ there is a place of recovery from the hurts and heartaches of life.

Then the last couplet:

**Believed on in the world,
Taken up in glory.**

For the third time, there is a linking of the evident with the invisible. "Believed on in the world " was evident everywhere in that 1st century. Everywhere this good news was preached, new communities of transformed men and women (called churches) were springing up, transforming the moral climate of every city. Slaves and patricians alike were bearing robust testimony to the changes that came in their lives when they believed in Jesus.

That is the way the world is yet today. There is a profound wisdom in some of the nursery rhymes we all learned as children. It is interesting that the world has always reflected the condition described in Humpty Dumpty:

Humpty Dumpty sat on a wall.
Humpty Dumpty had a great fall.
All the King's horses and all the King's men
Couldn't put Humpty Dumpty together again.

That is a description of the human race. There is described the fall of man: Humpty Dumpty sat on a wall -- and then he had a fall. When he fell, all the wisdom of men (all the king's horses and all the king's men) could never get that splattered, shattered egg back together again -- although they have been trying for centuries.

But what was impossible to the king's horses and the king's men is easy for the King. He puts men back together again. That is the good news, that is the gospel -- that in Jesus there is power to lay hold again of all the possibilities of life. No matter how bad our failure has been, how broken we have become, how foolishly we have acted, how godless we have been, how hateful we have become, in Jesus Christ there is the possibility of change; in fact, the certainty of change.

As we begin the Billy Graham Crusade in San Jose this afternoon, my mind goes back to 1958, when Billy first came to the Cow Palace in San Francisco. This church was very much involved in that Crusade. We took a lot of people up and watched them as they listened to the good news. One night my wife and I took Joan Baez up to the Cow Palace and watched her sit under the preaching of Billy Graham. We watched the tenseness in her face as she obviously felt the impact of that message, struggling with what she should do. She refused it, turned aside from it, and has gone on to other things. There were many like that.

I remember one couple I met shortly after that, John and Helen Edrington. John was a dental surgeon in this area. His marriage had fallen apart; he and his wife were on the verge of divorce. They hated each other; they could not stand to speak to one another. There was a deep bitterness of spirit between them and they had separated.

John Edrington had a nurse who was a Christian, and she asked him again and again to go to the Crusade. He refused, saying he was an atheist. But at last, under her urging, he decided to go. He went that night, then came back the next night and again the next night. Somewhere along the line John Edrington responded to the invitation and went down and turned his life over to Jesus Christ.

There was an immediate change in John. His attitudes were different; he started thinking about his marriage again, and within a week or so he went back to Helen and confessed his sins to her and asked her forgiveness. They were reunited, and she too became a believer. That marriage was so fully restored that it became almost a joke here at PBC. We laughed about the new honeymooners we had in our congregation. They fell in love again and for many years they grew in grace and strength. John became an elder here in the congregation, a teacher of the gospel, and an excellent counselor. He went to be with the Lord just a few weeks ago.

What a testimony to the power of Jesus to change lives! That is what this phrase, "Believed on in the world" means. It is an amazing miracle and it has been happening for two thousand years. It is no different now than it was in that 1st century when this amazing message went out, that in Jesus there is hope; in Jesus there is recovery; in Jesus there is deliverance and forgiveness of sins.

The last phrase of the couplet,

Taken up in glory

explains the miracle. Do not read that, "taken up into glory." It means more than that Jesus went into heaven. It says that he was taken up in glory. That is, he was already glorified when he was taken up. It is that glorified state of Jesus that constitutes the explanation for the miracles of transformed lives through two thousand years of ministry.

I do not think anyone has explained that any better than these words from William Temple in his Readings in St. John's Gospel. He says:

In the days of His earthly ministry, only those could speak to Him who came where He was. If He was in Galilee, men could not find Him in Jerusalem; if He was in Jerusalem, men could not find Him in Galilee. But His Ascension means that He is perfectly united with God; we are with Him wherever we are present to God; and that is everywhere and always. Because He is "in Heaven" He is everywhere on earth; because He is ascended, He is here now. Our devotion is not to hold us by the empty tomb; it must lift up our hearts to heaven so that we too "in heart and mind thither ascend and with Him continually dwell"; it must also send us forth into the world to do His will; and these are not two things, but one.

That is why, throughout these two thousand years of church history, Jesus Christ has been the answer to the puzzles of life. You find yourself when you find Jesus. He can put you together. He can mend the broken egg of our lives and put us back together again. That, Paul says, is the central fact of history. Nothing is more important than that. Jesus is available to us and we live our lives by his power daily made available.

A businessman of my acquaintance has said this in a very effective way:

Jesus did the most ordinary kind of jobs. It takes all God's power in me to do the simplest things -- his way. Christianity is not a way of doing special things. It is a special way of doing everything. Can I talk to a woman as Jesus did? Or ask for a drink of water? Or cook fish? Or walk through my hometown? Or talk to my men? It is bosses and basins and towels and washing fishermen's feet.

The dusty pedestrian duties of life demand God Almighty in us. It takes as much of the power of God for me to go to my office and sit at the desk and talk on the phone -- as I should -- as much of God's power to go through my regular routine as it does for me to preach a sermon or write a religious book. An evening with my wife. A golf tournament with my son. An ice cream adventure with my daughter. A conference on financial budgets. I am not supposed to be a gilt-edged spook with wings making a holy hum: one-half human and one-half angel. I am supposed to be a normal, natural, down-to-earth human, full of creation's practical Spirit -- the 13th chapter of 1 Corinthians dressed up in mod clothes.

Then he quotes this verse from Scripture, "Whatever you do, whether you eat or drink, do it all for God's glory," {cf, 1 Cor 10:31}. And he adds:

There's nothing very churchy about eating and drinking, you say? Of course not -- that's the good news. Awesome news, but good news. Church is everywhere. Wherever you go you can say with Jacob at Bethel, "This is the house of God, this is the gate of heaven." Ruth Graham has a motto over her kitchen sink: "Divine service performed here three times daily."

That is Christianity. That is what this is all about. The secret of life is Jesus going with you day-by-day, involved in everything you do, and you drawing upon his wisdom, his power, his daily forgiveness. He sets aside your guilt, cleansing you afresh, so that the Holy Spirit bears witness to your spirit that you are justified by faith. Thus you can proceed with calmness, courage and confidence to take hold of life and deal with it in the midst of the daily pressures.

That is Christianity as it was intended. It has nothing to do with religion. Religion is man's groping, faltering, fumbling search after something bigger than himself that he can believe in. But Christianity is not that. Christianity is a living Person made available to us by the Holy Spirit, granting to us the courage, the cleansing, the purity and the grace to live as God's man and God's woman in every situation.

That is Christianity.

That is the great mystery of wholeness in our lives.

Title: The Central Glory

By: Ray C. Stedman

Series: Studies in First Timothy
Scripture: 1 Tim 3:16
Message No: 10
Catalog No: 3773
Date: Unknown Date in 1981

FRAUDULENT FAITH

by Ray C. Stedman

Chapter four of First Timothy begins with dramatic and intriguing words. The apostle says:

Now the Spirit expressly says that in later times some will depart from the faith by giving heed to deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons, {1 Tim 4:1RSV}

As a young Christian, in my early 20's, I remember reading that verse in the King James version, which uses the phrase, "the latter times," rather than, "the later times," was taught that this meant that before the Lord's return, in the last days, there was to be a departure from the faith, a great apostasy within the church. That was the time of the fundamentalist-modernist controversy. The fact that so many were then turning toward a liberal Christianity was regarded as fulfillment of the great apostasy that is predicted by the Spirit, and many church leaders at that time were saying so.

As we draw near to the end, before the return of the Lord, there may come an increasing departure from the faith, but I do not think this passage is talking about any one great departure. In fact, other Scriptures suggest that the departure from the faith will occur at the time of the appearance of the man whom Paul, in Second Thessalonians, calls "the man of sin" {2 Th 2:3 KJV}, the so-called "antichrist" {1 Jn 2:18}, who will lead this great departure from the faith.

This verse in First Timothy, however, is more properly understood when it is translated, "in succeeding seasons there will be many departing from the faith" -- i.e., this is something that is going to go on, the apostle is suggesting, throughout the whole course of Christian history, in succeeding seasons of time. Just as there are several seasons in a calendar year, so in the calendar of history God has seasons for human events -- seasons of war, seasons of peace, seasons of unrest in society, when everything seems to be torn apart (we are going through such a season now); seasons of discovery, when the human mind breaks through into new vistas of truth, geographical discoveries, scientific discoveries; seasons of retrenchment, when everything seems to quiet down; and, as the apostle clearly says here, "seasons of deceit," when error breaks forth afresh; like a fountain, it seems to gush out a whole new spectrum of untruth. I have lived long enough to have seen several such seasons.

These seasons of deceit were predicted by the Holy Spirit, we do not know how. Perhaps Paul learned this in some of those direct visions and visits from Jesus himself. Perhaps it came through the prophetic ministry of some of the New Testament prophets. At any rate, the Spirit had precisely stated that there would be succeeding seasons of deceit.

Many of you may welcome the view of Archbishop Trench, one of the great teachers of the church. He explains this word as it appears in the original Greek, in this way:

The seasons are the joints or articulations in the times, the critical, epoch-making periods, foreordained of God, when all that has been slowly, and often without observation, ripening through long ages, is mature and comes to the birth in grand, decisive events which constitute at once the close of one period and the commencement of another.

In the last part of the 19th century, there was a pronounced season of deceit, when new cults that have occupied the scene ever since emerged here in America. Mormonism was born then; Jehovah's Witnesses came into being during that latter part of the 19th century; Christian Science emerged. All of these claimed to be Christian, yet they distorted biblical Christianity. That period in the 19th century was followed by a period of quiet, when no new cults emerged. Error was being taught but no new organizations were formed.

Suddenly, in the mid-60's, it all broke loose again. A torrent of error began to flood our churches and the media. The Moonies came into existence under the Korean leader, Sun Myung Moon; the Hare Krishna, those young people in saffron robes with shaved heads, started appearing in airports, passing out literature and pinning flowers to lapels; Scientology, with its strange and cruel doctrines, was born; Transcendental Meditation came into popularity then.

Here the apostle is explaining that strange phenomenon to us. He says these things will occur in successive seasons of time. During those times, Paul says, many will depart from the truth, depart from the faith as it is presented in the apostolic Scriptures.

These groups make their appeal in various ways: some appeal to the emotions, some to the intellect, some to the will, to the pride of mankind. But they all have one common characteristic. This characteristic is indicated in this passage by the way the apostle moves from the central truth of Christianity, "the mystery of wholeness" (the person of our Lord and his work) expressed in Chapter 3, Verse 16, to the sharp and stark contrast of this "departure from the faith." Thus Paul seems strongly to suggest that the central focus of all error is to present a different Jesus; that is the key mark of deceit.

If you want to know whether a group you are listening to, or are in touch with, is preaching and teaching true Christianity, ask yourself: "What do they say about Jesus? Who is he? Is he God appearing as man? Did he come in the flesh? Is he the Savior who has in himself accomplished all that God requires for the redemption of humanity?" Ask yourself, "What part does the blood of Jesus play in this teaching? What is said about his Person?"

The central deviation of all religious error is a negative testimony to the centrality of Christ in the universe. Even the unseen forces of life know that Jesus is central. Jesus is truly Lord, so the thrust of error is to attack him.

This is why in a university like Stanford it is possible to teach Buddhism, or some other teaching, and find it widely approved and supported by the faculty and the administration. Someone told me this morning that he took a course at Stanford University on Druids and Druidism and the religion of King Arthur. It became evident through the course that the teacher believed these things and was actively propagating a belief in Druidism -- and nobody objected. But when Jesus, when true Christianity, is presented, there immediately is sharp and subtle opposition against it. This is what the apostle is pointing out.

Paul reveals the ultimate origin of these cults as coming from "deceitful spirits." Men do not invent errors like this. They come through men (Paul is going to say something about that in a moment) but the actual origin of these distortions of reality about our Lord are coming from deceitful spirits, lying spirits, whose very nature is to lie.

When we compare this teaching with other parts of Scripture we learn that these are fallen angels. At a time even before the world was created, these angels followed their leader, Lucifer (Son of the Morning), highest of the angels of God, into a rebellion against the will and purposes of God. Thus they became identified with Lucifer's nature, which Jesus himself informs us is that of a "liar and a murderer," {John 8:44}.

Yet that being, that strange, malevolent, being who is by nature a liar and by intent a murderer, is called everywhere in Scripture, "the god of this world" {2 Cor 4:4}. That is a frightening thought. The god which the world ignorantly, and innocently, in many ways, follows blindly, like an animal being led to the slaughter, is a murderer and a liar. These hosts of spiritual beings, which Paul recognizes in Ephesians 6 as the ones with whom we Christians wrestle -- "Not flesh and blood but principalities and powers, wicked spirits in high places, the rulers of the darkness of this world" {cf, Eph 6:12 KJV} -- are the very ones who originate these false and twisted ideas about Jesus.

We learn from Scripture that these spirits have access to the inner thoughts and feelings of men, including Christians. We are all affected by strange urges, feelings, and desires that arise within us. But those desires do not always originate with us. We need to learn that all the thoughts that cross our minds are not necessarily coming from us. Those thoughts are what Paul calls, "fiery darts of the wicked one" {Eph 6:16 KJV}, against which faith must continually wrestle. These strange, sinister, unseen beings who have access to the minds and hearts of men, mislead and misdirect by what seems to us and to many to be logical and essential things that human nature should accept and even require. All that becomes expanded and supported by intricate arguments and rationalizations until it takes the form of what Paul calls, doctrines, i.e., formally reasoned presentations. But Paul clearly calls these, "doctrines of demons."

These doctrines are not always overtly religious either. What Paul is talking about in that 1st century day is clearly religious, and he is warning Timothy about it, but these "doctrines of demons" oftentimes come cleverly disguised as scientific theories, psychological approaches, or even economic theories. But the result of them is always the same: they confuse, they mislead, they distort reality; and they end, ultimately, in the destruction of human life. One way or another, that is the devil's aim.

- Take, for instance, humanism. This is probably the most widespread philosophy of our day. All the great institutions of our country, such as Stanford University, are almost visibly dedicated to the propagation of secular humanism. Humanism says that man is his own god, there is no being greater than man, we are able by our intellect and by our technological abilities to control the universe to our purposes, that this is the whole purpose of life and nothing is greater, etc. This exaltation of man, this worshipping at the shrine of human wisdom and human knowledge is a "doctrine of demons." It is not reality; it denies reality. It denies the greatest fact of the universe, that there is a Creator from whom we came and to whom we are ultimately accountable. It is a doctrine that is widespread, propagated by lying spirits.
- I believe evolution also to be such a doctrine. Evolution finds recognition and honor in the scientific community, yet hardly a shred of evidence links evolution to empirical facts of the material universe. Yet evolution has been accepted, propagated widely, and taught in all our schools as though it were truth. When compared to the actual findings of

scientific endeavor it can never find support. It is a doctrine of demons.

- Some thirty or forty years ago the idea that we could spend our way out of poverty into prosperity -- deficit spending -- took root in our nation. That too is a doctrine of demons. It ought to be recognized immediately as false. We ought to laugh it out of court, but it is widely accepted; political movements and parties have it in their platforms. Yet the end result of this philosophy is that we are burdened with a terrible load of debt that crushes and destroys us. It sets one family against another, resulting in violence and disturbance, and ultimately death, in society. That is a doctrine of demons.

We are not engaged in a Sunday School party. We are in a deep and abiding war that is being fought with spiritual weapons. We are up against these spiritual "principalities and powers," these "rulers of the darkness of this world."

Paul narrows this discussion to religious error particularly. He says the doctrines of demons in Ephesus were making their appearance through human beings whom he says, in Verse 2, are:

... pretentious liars whose consciences are seared, {1 Tim 4:2 RSV}

Ultimately these errors come into human knowledge through human beings. It looks like people thought them up, but the apostle tells us they did not. People themselves are deceived victims of a propaganda that has been placed in their minds by these invisible beings.

The apostle suggests two things about these human propagators of error that are always identifying marks:

1. First, they deal in pretensions. These people come to us with lofty-sounding claims. They appear to offer something extremely attractive and alluring, something that everybody would want. They make claims for themselves as having special prerogatives as teachers of truth. They have access to information that is denied the rest of us, they say; they have a special pipeline, a privileged relationship to deity, that the rest of us do not have. These are pretensions, the apostle says. They are merely claims people make.
2. Along with this these people are always characterized by some degree of a "seared conscience." That means they no longer have moral scruples; they no longer can be restrained by appeals to their conscience. They will stop at nothing to accomplish their end; they are without compassion or mercy. They become cruel, voracious, impossible to stop. Though they may veil it with a velvet glove, behind their teaching is an iron fist.

Yet the word "seared" clearly suggests that there was a time, perhaps, when these people's consciences were active. When they began they probably were simply egotists, men and women who were convinced they had abilities and powers beyond what they really possessed. They were out to get ahead. This is a widespread phenomenon in human society; we all suffer from it to some degree.

If you read the life of Adolph Hitler you discover that, as a young man, there were many admirable things about him. He was intelligent, knowledgeable about life; he had good morals, respect for the church, all these things, but he was an egotist. He always had to be dominant; he had to be in charge of everything he had anything to do with. Gradually, feeding that insatiable maw of egoism, he dropped his moral scruples, until at last his egoism climaxed in the killing of six million Jews, just because they were in his way.

A seared conscience is what the apostle says becomes characteristic of men who give themselves to religious error. What a tremendous revelation along this line was given to us here in this area just a few years ago in the story of Jim Jones and the People's Temple! This was the story of a man who began with certain restraints and moral scruples. Nevertheless, by feeding his own ego he soon lost all those scruples, and ended up in that terrible scene in the jungles of Guyana.

Paul says the specific methods of these 1st century cultists are that (Verse 3):

... [they] forbid marriage and enjoin abstinence from foods which God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth. {1 Tim 4:3 RSV}

One of the strange marks of religious error is that it is so often accompanied by ascetic practices, i.e., denial of certain normal, natural human enjoyments. One of them is marriage. A number of groups have been characterized through the years as forbidding marriage to their adherents, with the idea that sex is unclean, and those who indulge in it are certainly less dedicated than those who refrain.

Foods come under this heading too. I do not mean to imply at all that there is anything wrong with diets. It is obvious that some people need dieting. There is nothing wrong with studies on nutrition, proper eating, etc. Nevertheless, through the course of human history there has been a strange affinity between food restrictions, food fads, and religious error.

The reason is that at the heart of asceticism is a conviction that self-denial somehow pleases God. It can be very earnest, very sincere. Often Christians fall into this error in their early Christian days, thinking that if they deny themselves in some way God is going to be pleased, and their status in his sight will be advanced. That is why some Christians love to get up early in the morning, or memorize hundreds of verses of Scripture, or pray on their knees for long periods of time, etc. These practices, which in themselves are not wrong, nevertheless become wrong because their motive (that of gaining God's favor by self-denial) is wrong.

This is a good example of the subtlety by which error begins. When a deviation enters a stream of truth, at the first point of deviation, error looks like truth; it is very hard to see it as error. This is what has misled so many people. They never recognize error until they became engrossed in it. Down the line they begin to suspect that it is error, but by that time they are already hooked. This is what many cultists use today to gain followers, and hold them in bondage.

There is a difference between self-denial and denying self. Jesus said, "If anyone will come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me," {Luke 9:23}. That is denying self. But that is easily confused with self-denial, which says, "I will give up this thing or that thing." "I will not do this or stay out of that, because I want to reveal my dedication." "I want to be admired for my zeal." "I want to gain a special mark of favor before God." "I want to influence God to do something for me in return." That motivation renders it no longer denying self, but self-denial.

How subtle the differences are! Self-denial is an attempt to earn favor apart from faith in the gift of righteousness which makes us wholly acceptable before God right at the very beginning of our Christian life; while denying self is a refusal to heed those silken arguments of the inner ego that makes its appeal to us to show how good we are by giving up something, or to insist on having some right that we are defending.

"You are not your own," First Corinthians 6 says {1 Cor 6:19b RSV}. To acknowledge that is to deny self in a proper and true Christian way: I do not belong to myself any more. I am not in charge of my life. Another is my Lord, not me. Another has the right to the final word as to whom I marry, where I go, what I do and how I behave. I am not my own. Acknowledging that is to deny that insistent claim of the flesh within: "You are your own. Don't let anybody tell you what to do. Don't let anybody take that position." That is what the Lord Jesus calls us to deny; that is a true denying of self. This other is self-denial, which becomes an expression of the pride and egoism of the flesh.

Paul answers these teachings in very simple, very beautiful words. He goes back to the doctrine of creation, saying that these teachers.

... enjoin abstinence from foods which God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth. For everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving; for then it is consecrated by the word of God and prayer. {1 Tim 4:3b-5 RSV}

Paul says it is simple to handle these strange pressures and urges of the flesh within us, by cultivating the habit of thanksgiving. See everything coming to you as a gift that you have no right to, but it is yours by the grace and mercy of God.

Thanksgiving is a recognition that you do not possess anything in yourself, that everything comes as a gift from a loving God. When you do that you recognize two wonderful things: First, that God gave these things to our race for our enjoyment and enrichment. He did not give them that we might practice denial of them; he wanted us to have them.

But God wanted us to have them in ways that do not feed our ego and minister to our self-importance; and the only way that we can do so is to receive them with thanksgiving. That is what "for then it is consecrated by the word of God and prayer," means. Consecration means to put something to its proper use, and thus to render it safe for you to use.

The habit of giving thanks accomplishes that. When you take everything as a gift of God -- your life, your breath, your family, your friends, your clothing, your food, your circumstances, your trials, your pressures, your problems -- and thank God for them, then they are rendered safe. You no longer are the king on the throne, dictating to the rest of the world how to behave; you are a humble recipient of the gift from the Father's hand.

I love to see families giving thanks around the table before they eat. Food is the basic element of life. We are to give thanks for our daily bread because,

"Back of the bread is the snowy flour,
and back of the flour the mill.
Back of the mill is the field of wheat,
the rain and the Father's will."

That is why we thank God. Everything comes from his hand.

Let me share with you these words from a young man of thirty-two years of age whose wife fell ill. As she slept by his side one morning he mused in these words:

She may die before morning, but I have been with her for four years. Four years! There is no way I can feel cheated if I didn't have her another day. I didn't deserve her for one minute. And I may die before morning! What I must do is die now. I must accept the justice of death and the injustice of life. I have lived a good life, longer than many, better than most. Tony died when he was twenty. I have had thirty-two years. I couldn't ask for another day. What did I do to deserve birth? It was a gift. I am me. That is a miracle. I have no right to a single minute. But some are given a single hour, and yet I have had thirty-two years.

Few can choose when they will die, but I choose to accept death now. As of this moment I give up my right to live and I give up my right to her life. And so it is morning. I have been given another day. another day to hear and breathe and smell and walk and love and glory. I am alive for another day.

On the wall of one of my rooms at home is a little plaque that says:

There is no thought worth thinking
Unless it is the thought of God.
There is no sight worth seeing
Unless it is seen through his eyes.
There is no breath worth breathing
Without giving thanks to him
Whose very breath it is.

What paupers we are in ourselves! What rich people we are by the gift and the grace of God; and what we do to preserve sanity when we utter thanksgiving in God's name!

Title: Fraudulent Faith
By: Ray C. Stedman
Series: Studies in First Timothy
Scripture: 1 Tim 4:1-5
Message No: 11
Catalog No: 3774
Date: Unknown Date in 1981

A GOOD MINISTER

by Ray C. Stedman

Last week Ron Ritchie and I were at Indiana University. We had a great time of Christian fellowship on a beautiful campus in the midst of all the fall colors. Besides the students, some of the townspeople had come up to our meetings, and among them was a young pastor by the name of Lou who showed up for every meeting. He was very spiritually hungry. He sat down and talked with me at great length, telling me some of the problems he was facing. He seemed to welcome the opportunity to share with an older, more experienced Christian. (Obviously, I am too young-looking to inspire that kind of confidence, but Ron Ritchie, with his grey hair and beard, awakened that sense of desire in this young man!)

As I watched that young pastor I was reminded of Timothy, left alone in Ephesus, having to face the problems of a growing church in a pagan city, longing many times, I am sure, to have Paul there to ask him a question or to go over a situation with him. How Timothy must have welcomed this letter from the apostle to encourage him in the midst of his dangerous and demanding life! How many times he must have said, "Where is Paul right when I need him?" Yet I am glad that Paul was not there, because if he had been we never would have received this great letter to Timothy, and the church through twenty centuries would not have been the beneficiary of the counsel of the apostle.

Paul never minced any words when he wrote to Timothy; he faced with realism the situation that confronted Timothy, without turning from it in any degree. Paul knew this young man was up against a tough, hard, dangerous situation that called for a cool head, a loving heart, a careful behavior, and a strong, sturdy, unwavering faith. The apostle reminds Timothy of this several times in this letter.

The passage we are looking at this morning is one of those warnings, one of those reminders of the need for a personal walk before God. First Timothy 4:6-10:

If you put these instructions before the brethren, you will be a good minister of Jesus Christ, nourished on the words of the faith and of the good doctrine which you have followed. Have nothing to do with godless and silly myths. Train yourself in godliness; for while bodily training is of some value, godliness is of value in every way, as it holds promise for the present life and also for the life to come. The saying is sure and worthy of full acceptance. For to this end we toil and strive, because we have our hope set on the living God, who is the Savior of all men, especially of those who believe. {1 Tim 4:6-10}

With these words Paul seeks to encourage Timothy to stand fast in the midst of the pressures facing him.

It is necessary that we clearly understand the phrase Paul uses about Timothy. When he calls him, "a good minister of Christ Jesus," he is not thinking of him as a member of the clergy, like we would think of the pastor of a church, standing up in front of a congregation. The word that is used here is actually the word, "deacon," rather than minister -- "a good deacon of Jesus Christ." Even then the word is not referring to Timothy as an officer of the church; rather it is the word that is commonly translated many places in Scripture, "a servant." That is what a deacon is -- one who serves. Here Paul is using the word in the widest sense possible -- "a good servant of Jesus Christ." Of course, in that sense that word includes everyone. All of us are called to be servants of the Lord Jesus, especially if we are in any ministry of teaching, or leading, or discipling someone.

In order to be a good servant of Jesus Christ the apostle says you need certain things; and the first admonition Paul gives Timothy is: Watch what you are feeding on! Be nourished on the words of the faith and the good doctrine which you have followed. Nourishment is what he is talking about.

What are you nourished by? That is the question this passage raises before us. What do you feed on daily? What do you put in your mind? What is your habitual input in your life? The sports pages, perhaps? Soap operas? The Dow Jones averages? TV movies? Best-seller novels? If any of those things are your daily diet, then I can guarantee you will be a spiritually undernourished servant of Jesus Christ, because the apostle makes clear that what you feed on is what is going to determine how effective you become.

I do not want anyone to eliminate any of those things as though they are wrong. Not one of them is wrong in itself. We are not to eliminate them, but we are to regulate them. That is the point Paul makes. Regulate them as things that can be very dangerously distracting to us and often too easily controlling of our thoughts.

The apostle urges Timothy to give himself instead to that which really feeds his spiritual life. What do you essentially need? Paul tells us: "the words of the faith, and good, sound doctrine." Do not be afraid of that word, *doctrine* ; it means teaching -- the teaching of the truth, the reality of life. That is what Christians need.

Notice how Paul combines two important elements: knowledge, and decision. He says you need the good, sound words of the faith and good, sound teaching, and you are to follow them.

First you learn, and then you do what it says.

That is the formula for a good servant of Jesus Christ -- giving yourself to nourishing yourself, feeding upon these things and then following them.

You hold in your hands the greatest book ever written, the most amazing book in all the world, the only place in all humanity, in all human history, where you are given the bedrock, undiluted truth about life. The Word of God gives you the insights of God into life, the explanation of who you are, what God intended you to be and what will fulfill you. No book is more important to learn, to feed upon, than the Word of God. It is a big book; it takes a lot of reading, a lot of studying, a lot of thinking and meditating to grasp what it says, but when you do, it will change your life; it will lead you into fullness, freedom, liberty and beauty. That is what the Bible is for. So to feed upon this word is tremendously significant and important. That is why Paul stresses this with Timothy, reminding him of it.

In many ways this congregation is a biblically-taught congregation. The strongest point of this church may be that we teach the Word; we teach it widely and thoroughly. Yet I am continually amazed how many people, even here, really do not know the Bible. They do not know what it says and what it means; they cannot explain it. I know you are not going to make foolish, silly and shallow answers to Bible questions. You are never going to answer the question, "What are the four gospels?" as someone did, by saying, "Matthew, Mark, Luther and John." You know better than that. You are not going to say that you thought Dan and Beersheba were husband and wife like Sodom and Gomorrah, as someone said in answer to a Bible question. None of you, I am sure, are ever going to say that an epistle is the wife of an apostle. You know better than that.

But what if somebody asked you, "What does the new covenant mean?" Could you explain that? Could you tell them what it meant when Paul said he is "qualified to be a minister of the new covenant which gives life and not of the old written code which kills?" That is obviously something very important. Do you know what that means? The new covenant made in the blood of Jesus, and what it offers to us in terms of a foundation for living on a daily basis -- do you understand that? If you do not, you need to be nourished on the good words of the faith, and to follow the sound doctrine, the teaching of the Scriptures.

How many of you can explain the place of the Ten Commandments in the Christian's life after he becomes a Christian? There is very definitely a place for the Ten Commandments. The Law, as Jesus points out, is not done away with. Jesus came not to destroy the Law but to fulfill it, yet we do not live by the Law. Do you understand that? Can you explain that to someone?

Are you able to glory in the cross, as Paul did? Do you understand what the cross does to you as a person? Can you point out why the Apostle Paul's heart swelled with pride and thanksgiving when he thought of the cross of Jesus Christ, why he said, "In the cross of Christ I glory"? That is what we are talking about: knowing the Bible in such a way that its meaning has come home with tremendous significance to you personally, and you are nourished on this; every day you feed yourself upon this amazing revelation; you are learning more and more about yourself and about the world and society and why it functions and operates the way it does.

Then there is the matter of following truth. How many of you are learning to bless those who persecute you? I am tempted to ask for a show of hands, but I will not. Tomorrow morning the boss may eat you out for something you never did. How are you going to respond? Do you know already, in advance, what you should do and want to do and determine to do it?

What about your home? Is it open to strangers? Scripture tells us to practice the love of strangers. Are you planning this week to take in somebody you do not know, to get acquainted with him and make your home available to him? What about being tenderhearted, forgiving others, even as God for Christ's sake has forgiven you? Is that happening? What about laboring with your hands in order that you might give to those who are in need? Is that happening? Do you see how practical these things are?

Yet everywhere in the world, it seems, Christians take these things lightly; they pay lip service to them, but do not do them. It is doing them that makes the difference, however, not believing them. Truth known does not help anybody; it is truth done that changes the world, delivers the weak and comforts the brokenhearted. This is Paul's positive exhortation to young Timothy: Nourish yourself on the good words of the faith; understand the sound teaching and follow it, do it. Set yourself to this task; obey the truth that you have learned. That is positive.

But there is a negative side. Look at Verse 7:

Have nothing to do with godless and silly myths. {1 Tim 4:7a RSV}

There are a lot of distracting things you could give your attention and your mind to. Evidently this was true in the 1st century as well as ours. I do not know what it was that was particularly in Paul's mind when he wrote to Timothy. Paul mentions earlier in the letter something about foolish myths, etc. These myths were godless only in the sense that they were common. (It is actually the word for common; it was widespread; everybody around believed this superstitious nonsense.) And these myths were silly, because the word really means, "foolish old wives' tales" -- stories that foolish women, riddled with superstition, spread around and everybody believed them. Paul tells Timothy not to give himself to these kinds of things.

Yet these myths are the scourge of every generation.

- Last week the Peninsula Times-Tribune had an article right on the front page about a man at Stanford who confessed that all his life he was afraid of women and never knew why. (If he had four daughters, a wife and a mother-in-law in his home, like I had, I could perhaps understand that!) The article said that this man went to a woman who called herself "a researcher into past lives." She told him she had the ability to go back into the lives he had lived earlier and there she discovered (according to her) that he had been attacked by a woman once. This was what was now producing this strange fear of women. What a bunch of hogwash! It is pure rubbish, an old wives' tale. There is absolutely no semblance of reality to that kind of superstitious nonsense. Yet thousands of people, even Christians, are going in for that kind of thing, believing in reincarnation. The entire record of the Bible, from beginning to end, sets aside the teaching of reincarnation. Resurrection is the biblical truth. In the same body in which you now live this life you will live all eternity; you do not get another one. Anybody who believes the Bible about resurrection can never believe in reincarnation. That is nonsense; it is an old wives' tale. Do not give yourself to silly myths like that.
- Another widespread myth in our day, one that is winning increasing status on every side, is the doctrines of Mormonism. Mormonism is based upon foolish myths about early American history that do not have a semblance, a shred of evidence from archaeology, to support them. Archaeologists have tried to find any evidence whatsoever for the strange story the Book of Mormon tells, about an early American civilization that flourished here before Columbus came. They can find nothing that confirms it in any degree. Instead, everything they find is absolutely contrary to the

picture drawn in the Book of Mormon. But how many believe this nonsense, and how widely it is being accepted and even gaining a position of prominence among us! I am not talking about Mormons. Many of them are wonderful, dear people. Merely because people are lost is no sign they are worthless. Mormons are often marvelous people, but their teachings are in error. We ought to understand that and not give ourselves to godless and silly myths.

- I was with a group the other day and somebody was telling me, with shining eyes, how they had discovered a book that unfolded the secrets of the great pyramid of Egypt. I have been familiar with that kind of story for years; it has been exploded time and time again. There are no mysterious secret chambers of the great pyramid, and there is nothing that it teaches. It is a remarkable achievement; it has left unanswered a lot of riddles as to how it could have been built, but there are no secret and hidden mysterious revelations about it. You can get that kind of stuff in the Rosicrucian temple in San Jose if you want to read up on it. But heed the admonition of the apostle: do not give yourself to this claptrap. It is worthless; it wastes your time.

What are you going to do with your time? Nourish yourself on the sound words of the faith; build yourself up in the sound doctrine of the Scriptures; understand the truth as it is in Jesus. Give your daily attention to this, that you might be nourished, strong, well-fed, capable, efficient Christians.

The apostle now turns to the body. He says (Verse 7b):

Train yourself in godliness; for while bodily training is of some value, godliness is of value in every way, as it holds promise for the present life and also for the life to come. {1 Tim 7b-8 RSV}

There is the great verse for all the physical exercise enthusiasts. It raises the question, "Was Paul a jogger?" Certainly he was knowledgeable about some of these things. He speaks many times about the races that were run in the Greek world; he uses illustrations drawn from the boxing matches and gladiator fights. Maybe he had attended these occasions; I am sure he had. But I doubt if he gave himself very extensively to physical exercise, because, though, as he admits, it has a certain value about it, it is not where the drive of your life ought to be put. It ought to be in learning how to be a godly man or woman; a man or woman who walks with God in the midst of this life. (The word for godliness is that familiar word we have been looking at all through this letter, *eusebeia*, which really means "wholeness," "balanced," with the spirit being nourished and fed, the soul in order, and the body kept healthy and strong. That is what Paul is talking about.)

I think Paul was a walker, though not a jogger. On one occasion, the book of Acts tells us, he left a ship with his companions aboard, and while it sailed around a peninsula he walked twenty miles all alone across the neck of the peninsula in order that he might have time to meditate and pray and thus combine physical exercise with godly advance. Certainly Paul was not an overweight, self-indulgent, weak-willed opportunist. He knew the value of body training, but it occupied only a small part of his life. He did not give himself to it and go around flexing his muscles, like Arnold Schwarznegger, pointing out what a body beautiful he had. Paul was giving himself to the development of the spirit and of the soul. because that, he said, is all-important.

Paul did not wish he had time for reading, for prayer and for meditation; he took time, he made time for it. He underlines this for us in Verse 9:

The saying is sure and worthy of full acceptance. {1 Tim 4:9 RSV}

Five times in this little letter that formula is repeated. Each time it is Paul's way of taking his pencil and underscoring what he says: "Listen to this: this is very important." "Train yourself in godliness. Bodily exercise is fine, but godliness will profit both in this life and in the life to come."

That is, you will learn much for your present advantage; it will help you now to give you courage. That is what you get when you understand the new covenant:

- It makes you bold, courageous, confident that God is at work.
- It will give you direction: you will know which way to go, what to avoid, what to say no to and what to say yes to.
- It will give you comfort in hours of defeat, discouragement and failure: it will pick you up and revive your spirit.
- It will teach you to love when it is difficult to do so, and show you that by responding to the love of God the love of Christ can flow out from you to others.
- It will give you self-acceptance: you will have confidence without conceit.

The world does not know how to do that. It says the way to build confidence is to build up your conceit. But the Scriptures will teach you how to be confident without conceit. It is of help in this life, and in the life to come. All these things are needed beyond this world as well; so, as you build and learn how to live now, you will learn how to live then, and be able to function effectively as a believer in the new body and the new world to come. Therefore, combine the two.

I was in Milpitas yesterday meeting with a group of men, among whom was John Bristol, pastor of the First Presbyterian Church of Milpitas. John is a young man whom I have known for a number of years. He came to some of our early workshops and learned some things that he said changed his life. He told me one story yesterday that illustrated that. At that time he was on the staff of the Walnut Creek Presbyterian Church with Ron Ritchie and Jim Gordon. Jim used to be a boxer, and he kept his body in good shape. John said to him, "Jim, give me some tips on bodily training. My stomach muscles, especially, are always flabby and sagging; I need help in toughening them up. What can I do?" Jim said, "What I do is take a basketball and put it on the floor; then I lie on it, with the basketball right here on my stomach. I put my entire weight on that ball for as long as I can stand it and I roll around. That toughens my muscles." So John said he would try that. He did, but he did not want to build up his body only, so he said, "What I used to do was take one of Ray Stedman's messages and lay it on the floor, and as I was face down, rolling around on the ball, I was reading a message." That is what I call really being on the ball! He was building himself up both spiritually and physically.

The apostle closes this section with a very important word on motivation. What is going to motivate you to do this? Amid all the pressures and demands of this hour, all the hurry, hurry, hurry schedule of our days, what is going to make you take time to nourish yourself on the words of faith, feed on it daily, and decide to follow it, to do something? Here is the answer (Verse 10):

For to this end we toil and strive, because we have our hope set on the living God, who is the Savior of all men, especially of those who believe. {1 Tim 4:10 RSV}

That is what motivated Paul. "We toil and strive," he says. Those words indicate energy, something that requires effort, decision, commitment, action.

You cannot drift into godliness. You cannot get up in the morning, do your thing all day long, and grow and nourish yourself on the sound words of the faith. You have to set yourself to this:

- Choose times,
- Make times,
- Commit yourself to times of
 - Study,
 - Reading,
 - Meditation, and
 - Prayer.

Then you will have time for the other things, the normal demands of life.

But you must do this by deliberate action of the will. Pursue holiness, the Scriptures say; pursue godliness. Why? What motivates you? Paul puts it, "because our hope is set on an encounter with the living God."

Giving yourself to these things draws you near to God; and, the nearer you get to God, the more turned-on your life is going to be because he happens to be the most exciting Being in the universe.

You cannot get near the living Lord Jesus without sensing a rising excitement, a sense of adventure, of danger and of joy in your whole being. He is a living God, not like the dead idol that was being worshipped in the temple at Ephesus. There some distorted meteorite fragment was being bowed down to by these poor people, with the hope that it would give some sense of relief in their deadened lives. It is not that.

Or, as many feel today, it is not a reliance on human energy or wisdom that says it is up to you to make your way through life. That will let you down just when you need it most.

Rather, it is a daily encounter with the living God, the Lord Jesus Christ, Lord of heaven and earth, the One in charge of life who has a firm grip on everything that is happening to you. Your encounter with him becomes as electrifying and as full of promise and blessing as it was to the disciples in the days of his flesh -- and even more so, because he is nearer you than he was to them. We sing about this:

My hope is built on nothing less
Than Jesus' blood and righteousness.
I dare not trust the sweetest frame
But wholly lean on Jesus' name.

Is that happening in your life?

Do you wholly lean on Jesus' name all day long?

That is what happens when you are nourished on the great words of the faith, and in the sound doctrine of the Word of God, and follow it: You wholly lean on Jesus' name.

The closing words of this verse are very instructive. Here it is very clearly declared that Jesus has made salvation available to all men: He is the Savior of all men. Potentially, everyone in the world could be saved, were they to come to Jesus. He and no one else has made it possible. There is no other Savior, "no other name under heaven given among men" {Acts 4:12} can deliver but the name of Jesus. He is the Savior of all men.

But it only becomes effective, according to this verse, to those who believe.

Do you believe in Jesus?

I do not mean have you become a Christian. I assume most of you have. But having become a Christian, do you believe Jesus is with you?

- Do you believe that you would have been hopelessly lost without him?
- Do you believe that you have been fully forgiven and made acceptable before God by him?
- Do you believe that you are indwelt and empowered by him?
- Do you believe that you are headed for an eternity of glory with him?

That is what makes the difference. To really follow these things, to act upon them, to do something, not merely believe in your head -- that never delivered anybody, or blessed anybody -- it is what you do, on the basis of what you know, that makes the difference.

I want to close with the very wise words of Dr. Alan Redpath. He says:

Are you battling with yourself, defeated in life, going down under the buffeting? You face so many battles. None of us stands above you in this, because we know it all in our own hearts. But we would gladly tell you the good news that you overcome not by battle, but by faith and obedience. Any battle -- for victory, power, or deliverance from ourselves or from sin -- which is not based constantly upon the gazing and the beholding of the Lord Jesus, with the heart and the life lifted up to him, is doomed to failure.

You cannot make your way through life by yourself. The empty things of the world are not going to sustain you in the hour of anguish. These things you give your time to every day, wasting hours at what ought to require only minutes, will not make you strong. Your strength comes from being nourished on the good words of the faith and understanding the sound teaching of the Word of God and following it.

Prayer

Lord, teach us to be men and women of faith in this day; a faith that acts, a faith that rises up and obeys what you tell us to do. Teach us to walk that way, that we might demonstrate in this world that we are in touch with the living God; that the Lord Jesus himself walks with us through our daily life, and we are empowered and strengthened by his grace. We pray in his name, Amen.

Title: A Good Minister
By: Ray C. Stedman
Series: Studies in First Timothy
Scripture: 1 Tim 4:6-10
Message No: 12
Catalog No: 3775
Date: Unknown Date in 1981

ADVICE A YOUNG PASTOR

by Ray C. Stedman

I feel a great affinity to the section of the Apostle Paul's first letter to Timothy which we will be looking at this morning. I came to Palo Alto at the age of thirty-two, fresh out of seminary, not yet dry behind the ears, to work with men who were older than I. Many of these men had been Christians longer than I, some of them had national status as Christian leaders, yet I was expected

not only to minister the Scriptures before them but at times to work with them and even to correct some of the things that were being taught or viewpoints that were held.

I came here in September of 1950, having just spent a whole summer of fellowship and of ministry with Dr. H. A. Ironside, who was like a father in the faith to me. I felt very much as Timothy must have felt when Paul left him in Ephesus. The apostle had written to Timothy, charging him with training the pastors and elders of the church there, and giving him very specific instructions as to how to go about this.

Here are Paul's words, found in Chapter 4, Verse 11:

Command and teach these things. Let no one despise your youth, but set the believers an example in speech and conduct, in love, in faith, in purity. {1 Tim 4:11-12 RSV}

Timothy had been given a very difficult task. By this time he was in his mid-30's, having spent fifteen years traveling with the apostle all through the Roman Empire. Back in those days, you were not considered to be over the hill until you got to forty at least, and that is why Paul tells Timothy, "Let no one despise your youth." But it was a difficult situation, because Timothy had to minister with men who had already been elders of the church in Ephesus for a number of years. These men had been taught by the Apostle Paul himself, and yet, as the opening chapter makes clear, Timothy was expected to correct some of the things that were going on in the church. The third verse of the letter says:

As I urged you when I was going to Macedonia, remain at Ephesus that you may charge certain persons not to teach any different doctrine, nor to occupy themselves with myths and endless genealogies which promote speculations rather than the divine training that is in faith; {1 Tim 1:3-4 RSV}

That was a tough assignment for a young man. Timothy had to know how to go about it in a way that would not arouse the ire and opposition of others. Paul instructs him in the way a young man should minister among those who are older than he.

It is clear from this passage that *that* requires a whole life to be aimed in the right direction. I have always thought of the public Christian ministry as a battlefield in which one battles against powerful forces of evil and darkness. I have thought of this battle in terms of a fighter pilot doing battle with swift and skillful foes coming at him from various directions. But when a young man first enters the ministry he tends to think of the battle in terms of the old World War I-type bombers, which had a pilot who flew a steady course, while a gunner aimed his swivel-mounted machine gun at the enemy. Many young pastors aim the machine gun of Scripture at people, shooting at everybody who is out-of-line.

Somebody once called these young men, "flamethrowers" -- they like to burn a congregation. Charles Spurgeon, in a lecture to his students in London in the last century said, "Beware of being like some, who go about with theological revolvers in their ecclesiastical trousers." Some young men have a tendency to shoot from the lip. Modern-day jet fighters, however, give us a better picture of how the battle in the public Christian ministry is fought: Today the whole plane has to be aimed in order to bear upon the target. Here the apostle tells Timothy that his whole life has to be aimed at his objective.

There are two things the apostle tells Timothy to do and both are highlighted by two similar-sounding words, the monosyllables, *let* , and *set* : "Let no one despise your youth, but set a good example before them." When Paul says, "Let no one despise your youth," he does not mean, of course, that Timothy is to go around and take issue with anybody who does not like him. He means, rather, that Timothy is to be concerned about and aware of how he comes across to people; he is to be sensitive to how others see him.

That requires a knowledge of what it is in a young man's word that turns off older people. Many young people are unaware of how they sound to others. Perhaps one of the most common causes of a young man's ministry being rejected is the presence of what might be called youthful arrogance. This is often innocent -- the young person is not aware that he sounds or acts or seems this way -- but it is an unwarranted dogmatism, an appearing to be an authority without an adequate basis of experience. Many a young man makes that mistake. The Old Testament reminds us: "Let not him that girds on his armor boast himself as he that puts it off," {1 Ki 20:11 RSV}. Paul is urging young men to be aware of how they come across to older people.

But, somebody says, Paul says here, "command and teach these things." Young men especially love that word, "command." We all do; everybody likes to command. I hear my little two-year-old grandson commanding his brothers out in the yard, ordering them around. It comes naturally to us to command, to tell people what to do. I am sorry that this version translates it that way because the word is really not, "command," rather, it is, "proclaim," "announce." What Paul has said earlier in Verse 6, "Put these instructions before the brethren," is a very good amplification of what this word means. Call their attention to them, but not in an authoritative, a self-assertive way; that is the idea.

This week I was reading through the journals of Francis Asbury, the outstanding young Methodist missionary who began the

work of Methodism here in America. John Wesley sent him to this country to preach in the Eastern Colonies when he was twenty-six years of age. This young man rode on horseback through the Colonies, preaching everywhere he went. His record of riding horseback and preaching is probably unequaled in all history. It has been estimated that he rode 250,000 miles during the course of his ministry. Let me share with you a couple of entries from Francis Asbury's journal:

I packed up my clothes and books to be ready for my departure, and had an agreeable conversation with Mr. O. The next day some of my friends were so unguarded and imprudent as to commend me to my face. Satan, ready for every advantage, seized the opportunity and assaulted me with self-pleasing, self-exalting ideas, but the Lord enabled me to discover the danger, and the snare was broken. May He ever keep me humble and little and mean in my own eyes.

Another entry reads:

The Lord is pleased to show me the danger in which a preacher is of being lifted up by pride and falling into the condemnation of the devil. How great is the danger of this! A considerable degree of ballast is highly necessary to bear frequent and sudden puffs of applause. Lord, fill me with genuine humility that the strongest gust from Satan or the world may never move me.

It is not surprising that a young man with that kind of attitude accomplished a magnificent work in the Colonies. He provided the impetus for the Methodist Circuit Riders who later rode west, spreading the gospel as they went. As a young man in Montana, I remember talking to people who had known the ministry of one of those great Methodist Circuit Riders, Brother Van, who became one of the best-known men in Montana territory. He wore a big broad-brimmed hat, shot buffalo, and preached the gospel in all the saloons in Montana. This kind of ministry was made possible because these young men early understood that they must have a consciousness of the danger they faced of being arrogant, puffed-up and assertive in their ministry.

How then is a young man to proceed? The apostle says by setting a good example in two areas -- speech and conduct -- and three qualities ought to come through -- love, faithfulness, and purity. Those are the things that ought to characterize every young preacher: loving, faithful, pure speech, and loving, faithful, pure behavior.

A young preacher must, first of all, be loving. Not arrogant, not rude, not censorious, not critical, cruel or sharp in either word or deed.

And he must be faithful to his commitments, not toadying and flattering, using insincere words, not being irresponsible, unreliable and breaking promises.

The third quality is purity. I do not know anything that has destroyed more young ministers than impurity.

Ephesus was a city given over to sexual immorality -- it was more prevalent there than it is even in California today -- yet Timothy was expected to maintain a pure standard in the midst of that. There was to be no vulgar, obscene or profane words in his speech, no dirty stories or double meanings, and there was to be no sexual misconduct; no petting, no making-out, no indulging in pornography on the side. A pure life is the platform from which an effective ministry proceeds; without that all the words mean nothing. Somebody put that well in a Sunday School class this morning. He said he had learned "not to talk the talk, but to walk the walk." That is the platform that keeps people from despising a young man or a young woman's ministry.

Paul now turns to the public ministry of the Word. Here we are, in a way, invited to look inside the pulpit ministry, what lies behind it, and how it comes into being. Paul says (Verse 13):

Till I come, attend to the public reading of scripture, to preaching, to teaching. Do not neglect the gift you have, which was given you by prophetic utterance when the elders laid their hands upon you. Practice these duties, devote yourself to them, so that all may see your progress. Take heed to yourself and to your teaching; hold to that, for by so doing you will save both yourself and your hearers. {1 Tim 4:13-16 RSV}

In Chapter 2, Paul covered the place of prayer in public service, and now he turns to the subject of preaching. He tells Timothy that a preaching ministry ought to consist of reading the Scriptures in public, exhorting, and teaching.

Notice the centrality of the Scriptures there. Timothy is to read the Scriptures; then he is to exhort, to urge, to proclaim, to open up and make clear what the Scriptures say; and he is to teach, to explain the Scriptures. All this focuses on the Word of God. A congregation meets so that they might

- Hear the Word of God,
- Taught by a man of God,
- Led by the Spirit of God,

implanting that Word into every individual life and heart. That is what a Sunday morning service is supposed to consist of, and that is what Paul urges upon Timothy here in Ephesus.

Then Paul gives us three steps in the process behind this.

First, notice that he says, (Verse 14):

Do not neglect the gift you have, which was given you by prophetic utterance when the council of elders laid their hands upon you. {1 Tim 4:14 RSV}

Paul has referred to this gift earlier in this letter, and he does again in Second Timothy when he says to Timothy, "Rekindle the gift of God that is within you," {2 Tim 1:6 RSV}.

All believers are given a spiritual gift when they come to Christ. This is not merely for pastors and preachers. The point the apostle makes is that, having been given a spiritual gift, Timothy is expected to use it. There is a good deal of debate among the scholars as to what Timothy's gift was. Some think it may have been evangelism, because Paul, in his second letter to Timothy, says, "Do the work of an evangelist." Some think it was a pastor-teacher gift. I personally think it was that, but it may be both gifts, because God gives more than one gift to many of his people. Whatever it was, Paul urged Timothy to use it, and thus give a particular personal slant to his ministry.

A spiritual gift gives a personal flavor to a ministry because of the unique ability a man possesses by the use of his gift. This means that if a man is an evangelist he will look at the Scriptures evangelistically; if he is a pastor he will be looking at Scripture from the standpoint of feeding the sheep; if he is a teacher he will look at Scripture with a view to instructing the mind.

We have a wonderful example of this right here at Peninsula Bible Church. Various men share the platform here and they all handle Scripture in different ways. Steve Zeisler has a gift of analyzing. When you hear him, or read his messages, you note that he has insight into what the Scripture says, a penetrating insight into what exactly is the principle of life behind it. That is a manifestation of what Paul, in First Corinthians, calls the gift of wisdom, the ability to discern unusual insights from Scripture.

Brian Morgan has the gift of synthesizing, putting together various Scriptures. That is what the New Testament would call the gift of knowledge -- being able to bring together various passages so that they come into focus and stress a certain line of teaching in a very effective and powerful way. Ron Ritchie has the gift of dramatizing! He paints with very brilliant colors. That is what the Scripture would call a manifestation of the gift of exhortation, and that is why everyone loves to hear Ron because it is colorful, exciting. Bob Smith has a gift for systematizing -- that is the gift of teaching, putting Scripture in a logical order, the one-two-three of truth. All of these approaches are unique, but they are all dealing with Scripture. We ought to rejoice that we have these many different approaches.

In First Corinthians 3 the apostle makes clear that it is a weakening, even sinful thing for a congregation to choose up and identify themselves as only accepting one man's ministry. That is the flesh. Paul says. It is immature to say, "I like so-and-so." while someone else says, "I like so-and-so." That is what the Corinthians were saying: "I like Paul," "I like Apollos," "I like Cephas." Paul says it is childish to talk that way. God is using every man uniquely in his way.

The second thing Paul says is, prepare thoroughly. Verse 15:

Practice these duties, devote yourself to them, so that all may see your progress. {1 Tim 4:15 RSV}

It takes hours of thorough preparation to give a 35-minute message here on Sunday morning. Many of you in the congregation have no idea how much work is put into it. It's not a matter of standing up and sharing some things off the top of your head, things that occurred to you Saturday night or early Sunday morning. You can hear that kind of preaching in many places, but it is very evident that it is a shallow and superficial approach to Scripture.

A preacher must examine Scripture carefully. He must:

- Outline it,
- Meditate on it,
- Research it,
- Ask and answer questions in his own mind about it,
- Look up the meanings of words in the lexicons and books.
- Look for illustrations,
- Think through an introduction and a conclusion to his message,

and yet do all this without becoming mechanical or artificial. That takes a lot of work. Many of you perhaps think it is easy to stand up here and talk until you actually have to do so. I have watched people's knees shaking, their faces turning pale merely because they have to make an announcement, let alone deliver a message. No, preaching requires careful preparation of the heart, especially, as well as the mind.

Years ago I pasted in the front of my New Testament part of a poem by Henry van Dyke. I read it frequently because it is a prayer that says:

Grant us the knowledge that we need
To solve the questions of the mind.
Light Thou our candles while we read
To keep our hearts from going blind.
Enlarge our vision to behold
The wonders Thou hast wrought of old.

That represents an awareness that the book from which we teach is the Word of the living God. It is not a book review written by men, but it is the insightful analysis of life as it really is. It requires careful and prolonged handling, and a discipline that refuses certain diversions in order to give itself to this kind of labor.

The third thing the apostle says is, keep it personal.

Take heed to yourself and to your teaching; hold to that, for by so doing you will save both yourself and your hearers. {1 Tim 4:16 RSV}

There is a profound psychological principle stated there, and that is that you can only give to others what you yourself have first experienced, nothing more. A pastor can never bring anyone to a maturity which he himself does not possess; he cannot lead anyone further than he himself has gone. Pastors, preachers and teachers must themselves be growing and impacted by the Word; they must be changed and continually progressing. This is why Paul says here to Timothy, "That all may see your progress." The Word must first become personal to his own heart.

When Paul says, "You will save both yourself and your hearers," he is not talking about redemption. Timothy was already saved by the grace of God, and so were most of his hearers. The word is used in the same sense as Paul uses it in Philippians 2:13, where he says: "Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling for it is God who is at work in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure," {Phil 2:12b-13 RSV}. Paul is talking about salvation in the sense of fulfillment, maturity, experienced deliverance from evil and growing in the Lord; that is the idea.

I want to confess to you that I occasionally take one of my own messages and read it through. I am not trying to bolster my ego when I do so. In fact, it has the opposite effect upon me: it often humbles me. I see all the awkward phrasings, the unclear sentences and the mistakes in grammar and I am aware again of what a feeble instrument the Lord has to work with. But the truth blesses me anew. I remember the freshness with which the Word came to me when I was laboring on the message, how it opened my eyes in new ways, and made me make commitments which I need to recall. Reading through those messages affects me as though I were reading something that someone else had said. This, of course, indicates that it is not my work, it is God's work; it is his Word that is coming through. I am reminded of what power lies in the preached word when it ministers to me. I have the privilege of standing up every Sunday morning and ministering to two thousand people and that Word is multiplied. The same effect occurs in hundreds of hearts; homes are altered, business relationships are changed, people who would otherwise be divided are brought together again.

The power of the Word of God is magnificently enhanced by the preaching of a pastor who has faithfully done his work and who is ministering in the power of the Spirit. This is what Paul urges upon young Timothy. "You are in a very strategic spot," he says to Timothy. "In this ungodly city with all its pagan vices, its immorality, its widespread superstition, blindness and darkness you are in the position of instructing the people of God to so believe the truth of God that their lives will make impact throughout the city and the surrounding area. There will be a noticeable lifting of the level of life; people will be healed and homes changed. All that is committed to you," Paul tells him.

I do not know anything more exciting than that, nor anything I would rather do than open the Word of God, and proclaim it in the power of the Spirit of God. So I relate to this message to Timothy whether you do or not.

But it will have an effect upon your lives also. Many of you have an opportunity to be proclaimers of the Word so I hope you will, take these things to heart. Remember that the only platform from which effective ministry proceeds is the ministry of one who is inculcating love, faithfulness and purity in both speech and behavior into his life; one who takes the Word of God and utilizes the gift of the Spirit to prepare thoroughly so that the Word ministers to his heart and thus to the hearts of the whole congregation. That is God's formula for a successful ministry.

Prayer

Thank you, Lord, for this mighty Word. You sent your Word and healed men; you spoke and worlds came into being; you spoke and delivered people by the Word of truth. Lord, we thank you for the power of your Word; the most powerful force in all the universe is the Word of truth. We pray that we may give heed to it, believe it, accept it, live by it, walk in it, work by it, let it change our lives to be the men and women you want us to be in this generation. We ask in Jesus' name, Amen.

Title: Advice to a Young Pastor
By: Ray C. Stedman
Series: Studies in First Timothy
Scripture: 1 Tim 4:11-16
Message No: 13
Catalog No: 3776
Date: Unknown Date in 1981

THE CARE AND FEEDING OF WIDOWS

by Ray C. Stedman

In Chapter 5 of Paul's first letter to Timothy, the apostle addresses certain continuing problems in the church at Ephesus. Timothy will have to deal with various classes and people in the congregation; he will have to face problems of discipline -- even discipline of elders, as we will see in the latter half of this chapter.

The apostle opens this section with a general word about how to look at people. Verse 1:

Do not rebuke an older man but exhort him as you would a father; treat younger men like brothers, older women like mothers, younger women like sisters, in all purity. {1 Tim 5:1-2 RSV}

Hidden in that verse is another one of those profound psychological insights so frequently found in Scripture, which says that the way you treat people depends on how you see them. Paul is suggesting that if Timothy sees every older man in the congregation as a father, then he will treat him with a natural deference and respect.

How you look at other people is very important. In the world, almost everyone falls into the category of a rival who is trying to get the best of one, or a friend, whom one can use to get ahead. As Christians, however, we are to have a very different view of other people. Paul tells this young pastor to look at older men as he would look at his own father; to view them as men with some degree of experience, men who have survived crises in their lives, men who have developed a certain degree of understanding and wisdom by virtue of being young a long time.

Further, Paul tells Timothy to view young men as though they were his brothers. Again, this reminds Timothy that there is a family relationship involved. Young men are not his rivals, his enemies; they are his brothers. That relationship speaks of openness and honesty with one another, and yet respect and concern for each other. When a young man sees other young men as brothers he will treat them as such.

Paul tells Timothy to treat the older women as mothers. I remember various older women who were like mothers to me as a young man. As a result, I learned to treat them with great respect for the wisdom and love they manifested to me.

Notice that Paul does not say to treat older women as mothers-in-law. That is a different form of treatment! Really, mothers-in-law are all mothers too, and they need to be treated that way. My friend Howard Hendricks served as a pastor in a college town for a summer, and he discovered that several mothers in the congregation had designs on him to be their son-in-law. In fact, one of them said to him one day, "I am praying that you will be my son-in-law." When he tells this story, at this point, Howard always says, "Have you ever thanked God for unanswered prayer?"

Paul then tells Timothy that a young pastor should treat younger women as sisters -- with love, with interest and concern, but certainly without any attempts at sexual involvement. That is why Paul adds the words, "in all purity." A young pastor is to be pure in his intentions, his attitudes and his dealings with the younger women in a congregation. There would be nothing wrong with Timothy developing a romantic relationship that might eventually lead to marriage with a young woman in the congregation, but Paul is simply reminding him that the normal relationship of a young pastor to young women is that of a brother who is helping them, seeking to understand them and know them.

There is a wise word in the Song of Solomon that many of the present generation would do well to remember. The Song of Solomon is the one book of the Bible that is dedicated to romantic love, the love between a husband and a wife. In the midst of the beautiful language of the book there is an admonition given by the bride to her female companions: three times it says, "I charge you, O daughters of Jerusalem ... that you not stir up nor awaken love until it please" {Song 2:7, 3:5, 8:4}, i.e., do not artificially stimulate romantic involvement; do not work at it, do not develop it; it will come in time all on its own. In the meantime, relate to one another as brothers and sisters. That gives an opportunity to really learn who people are, without the blindness that accompanies sexual arousal. Proceed with all purity in this area, Paul warns Timothy.

Paul now turns to the problem of widows. In this 1st century culture, widows were a real concern to the churches. Soon after the birth of the church, shortly after the day of Pentecost, the book of Acts tells of the widows who murmured because they were being neglected in the daily distribution of food. That was the first internal problem confronted by the early church, and it came out of the culture.

In those days when a wife lost her husband there was hardly anything she could do to support herself. Very few businesswomen are mentioned in the New Testament. There is Lydia, the seller of purple, whom Paul met at Philippi. She, evidently, had found a trade where she could serve as a woman. There is Phoebe, the deaconess from Cenchrea, near Corinth, whom Paul mentions in Chapter 16 of Romans. She was a traveling woman and evidently a businesswoman.

In those days almost everybody got married. This was one reason why the Roman Empire was so strong and stable. Though it was pagan, and though there were many forces that disintegrated it from within, the Roman Empire nevertheless survived for many centuries because it emphasized a strong family unit. When a woman found herself without a husband in those days she needed care. Sometimes she was provided for, but not always so, so Paul gives Timothy admonitions as to how to deal with this matter. Here are his words:

Honor widows who are real widows. If a widow has children or grandchildren, let them first learn their religious duty to their own family and make some return to their parents; for this is acceptable in the sight of God. She who is a real widow, and is left all alone, has set her hope on God and continues in supplications and prayers night and day; whereas she who is self-indulgent is dead even while she lives. Command this, so that they may be without reproach. If any one does not provide for his relatives, and especially for his own family, he has disowned the faith and is worse than an unbeliever. {1 Tim 5:3-8 RSV}

Those strong words indicate how important this matter was in the early church, and, in principle, how important it ought to be to us today. In the early church, apparently, a special pension fund was maintained from which widows were supported; and those who were placed upon this roll pledged themselves to keep busy in a ministry of help and prayer, and not to marry again.

So certain limitations and qualifications had to be fulfilled. Some widows could be included in this; some were not qualified. Paul treats both of these categories in this passage. To be included, women must fulfill at least five qualifications which the apostle gives here.

First, they were to be real widows, i.e., they had no family to help them. If they had children or grandchildren, they had the responsibility to take care of the older members of the family, especially the widows who had no other means of support. This establishes the principle that it is really up to the family to take care of all of its members, as far as this is possible; and we can carry that principle over into our own times.

Today, however, with insurance often available to widows, independent income, the availability of jobs, etc., women oftentimes end up with more money than men. As a matter of fact, in this country more money is controlled by women than by men. Many widows are left richer than they have ever been in marriage. As far as the necessities of life are concerned such women are not to be the responsibility of the church in any way. But they are to be honored, as Paul points out in Verse 3. They are to be paid reverence and respect; they are to be shown love, compassion and concern to meet their emotional needs. This is what the church is responsible to do. These women were not to be put on the pension fund, though, if they had families.

Second, the apostle says,

She who is a real widow, and is left all alone, has set her hope on God and continues in supplications and prayers night and day; whereas she who is self-indulgent is dead even while she lives. Command this [i.e., announce this], so that they may be without reproach. {1 Tim 5:5-7 RSV}

This indicates that widows who were to be supported by the church were to give themselves to a spiritual ministry. They were to keep busy during these declining years of their life. They were not to utilize the time to entertain themselves, but they were to have a spiritual ministry.

In the letter to Titus, the apostle urges Titus to help the older women learn to teach the younger women. In our congregation there are a lot of younger women who would love to know older women whom they could call up to ask for advice, to pour out their hearts to them and share their struggles and problems with them. This is the kind of ministry the Word of God encourages older women, especially widows, to have -- to be available to the younger women of the congregation for prayer, for support, for teaching, for understanding.

This is a great ministry. I always feel hurt when I see a widow who has been left a considerable amount of money spending her days traveling around the world, going to bridge parties, and entertaining herself. The apostle implies that such a woman might as well be dead. She is not using her life as God intended. Her life is all focused on herself instead of others. As a result she is missing out on a wonderful ministry. Paul urges Timothy to make this clear so that widows may be without reproach, that they may use the years left to them in ways that are filled with blessing and ministry for others.

I am going to pass over Verse 8 for the moment and go on with Paul's list of requirements for widows on the church roll. Verse 9,

Let a widow be enrolled if she is not less than sixty years of age, [that is if you can find out how old she is!] having been the wife of one husband; and she must be well attested for her good deeds, as one who has brought up children, show hospitality, washed the feet of the saints, relieved the afflicted, and devoted herself to doing good in every way. {1 Tim 5:9-10 RSV}

First, a woman was to be at least sixty years old. In the early church that almost always meant that she had only a few years left to live. Most people died in their sixties in those days; very few lived into their seventies or eighties as they frequently do today. A woman left a widow at sixty today has, perhaps, twenty years of useful service left. To use those years in running around the world is a terrible waste. Here the apostle urges that in Ephesus they only take those who were sixty years of age or over. Such women presumably would not have too many years left, so they were asked to devote those years to the service of the Lord.

Then a woman was to be the wife of one husband. That has confused many people who have taken that to mean a woman could not be married more than once. Yet husbands died in those days; women at times were divorced in those days, so a widow could well have been married two or three times in the course of her lifetime. Take a prominent woman of today, like Elisabeth Elliot, who has been married three times. None of her marriages, failed -- her first two husbands died. If we were to take this the way some people do it would mean that a woman like that could not be enrolled. But in Verse 14 Paul urges younger widows to marry and bear children, so he certainly does not mean that if they marry again, when they reached the age of sixty or more and subsequently lost their husbands they could not qualify.

The word that is used here is similar to that requirement for marriage in the qualifications of an elder or deacon who were to be a "one-woman man." Here a woman is to be a "one-husband woman." This does not mean she cannot have been married more than once, but rather that when she is married her focus is on her husband. She is not a philanderer; she is not entering relationships in any degree with other men, but she was solidly behind her husband.

Then a widow must have good references: "She must be well attested for her good deeds" (Verse 10). There is quite a list of things here: "One who has brought up children, shown hospitality (her home has been open to many needs), and washed the feet of the saints." People were not dirtier in those days than they are today. They wore sandals then, not shoes. When one arrived at a house, therefore, somebody had to bring out a basin to wash his feet, and the mothers of the households frequently did this. This is also used as a symbol for any kind of menial ministry, one that others would pass by. It refers to women who showed a willingness to serve whatever the need. A humble spirit is the implication here.

Further, she must have "relieved the afflicted." She must have been ready to soothe the fevered brow of some neighbor, to clean up the house when someone was sick, to be available in a ministry of help to others. And last, she must have "devoted herself to doing good in every way." A woman who fulfilled all of these qualifications would commend herself and the whole Christian cause to the unbelieving community in powerful ways.

My wife Elaine was born across the bay in El Cerrito. Just a few months later her father died; her mother was left a widow, all alone, with no family around. But right across the street lived a dear godly woman, named Mrs. Rasmussen. She took that family into her heart, surrounded them with love and ministered to their needs. At that time my wife's mother was a Catholic and Mrs. Rasmussen was a Protestant, but that made absolutely no difference to this woman. She took them in. She prayed for them, loved them, ministered to them and encouraged them. When they left finally to go to live in Montana, she kept in touch with them by letter all the rest of her life. When Elaine and I were married and came back from Hawaii after the war, we stopped to see her. Her face was alight with the Spirit of God. She was cheerful, even though at the time she was bound by arthritis to a wheel chair. She was still an angel of mercy to the whole neighborhood; everybody loved her. What a godly woman! I am sure she turned hundreds of people to Christ by the power of her devoted, lovely, serving life.

This is what the apostle is urging upon widows. What a ministry opens to them! They now have time to do some of the things they have longed to do all through the busy days of raising children, taking care of their husbands, etc.

But some widows were not to be supported. Paul tells us why, in Verses 11 and on:

But refuse to enrol younger widows; for when they grow wanton against Christ they desire to marry, and so they incur condemnation for having violated their first pledge. {1 Tim 5:11 RSV}

That, perhaps, is the basis in Scripture for the appearance in history of orders of sisters, such as the Roman Catholic church has. This verse may have inspired such. The movie *The Sound of Music* is the story of Maria, a novitiate who wished to join an order of sisters and devote herself to a celibate life of service to others. But Paul would have refused to have taken in Maria because she was too young! He understood the pressures on a young woman to have a family, a husband, and children. "Don't enrol them," he says, but encourage them to marry again. Thus he indicates his understanding of the pressures upon young women.

In the biblical order only those who had already been married, who had already fulfilled their obligations and their desires along those lines, were to be enrolled in this special order of celibate persons, not younger women. This was quite contrary to younger women's urges and desires. Even though, in a moment of grief at the loss of a husband a young woman might desire to remain celibate the rest of her life, after a while that might change. That is what the apostle is facing here. He says that if she does, then she has to break her promise and he does not want her to do that. So the two reasons he gives here are, first, "they would prove unfaithful to their first pledge," which they made in a moment of deep commitment but were unable to live up to -- easily at least; and then, the second reason, given in Verse 13: They would tend to become "freeloaders," as we would call them today.

Besides that, they learn to be idlers, gadding about from house to house, and not only idlers but gossips and busybodies, saying what they should not. {1 Tim 5:13 RSV}

Life does not seem to have been very different in those days than it does today! Young women with lots of time on their hands, being supported by the church, might tend to fill their hours going about from place to place, drinking endless cups of coffee, telling all the news of the neighborhood -- and getting far too involved in other people's business. Today we call this a soap opera! That is what the television soap operas are about -- people who ought to be busy doing other things becoming all tied up in somebody else's affairs. No Christian woman should give herself to this practice, the apostle warns.

She is to be busy in other ways, Paul says.

So I would have younger widows marry, bear children, rule their households, and give the enemy no occasion to revile us. For some have already strayed after Satan. {1 Tim 5:14-15 RSV}

That passage must give fits to the feminists of our day. It urges women to stay home, marry, bear children, take care of their households, and in doing so they will remove the opportunity for the devil to attack and destroy the Christian church.

The home has always been the foundation of society. I am not saying that a woman cannot work, if that is needful, but even today it is interesting to see that many of the secular writers are facing the fact that getting a job so as to increase the income does not really solve the basic problems of a home, it brings in more problems. Ultimately no more money is available because the additional costs of baby-sitting, a second car, and other necessary expenses mean that no more money is actually coming in; the standard of living remains about the same.

The terrible deprivation of children with working mothers, however, is impossible to estimate. I know that when a child comes home from school to an empty house something dies inside of him. It is a very serious matter to take mothers out of homes and put them to work. Unless it is necessary for them to help sustain the basic income of a family it is an unwise thing to do. Paul recognizes that. He shows that the enemy is quick to seize such a situation and use it to break up a marriage, a home, destroy the children and change the relationship between a husband and wife. We are surrounded by the evidence of that today.

We cannot improve on the wisdom of the Scripture. Here the apostle was clearly urging the younger widows to reestablish their homes, to be there as mothers, fulfilling the greatest responsibility and the greatest privilege a woman can fulfill.

The final summary is found in verse 16:

If any believing woman has relatives who are widows, let her assist them; {1 Tim 5:16a RSV}

This was a word addressed not only to male relatives but to female relatives also. If they, married women, had widows on their

side of the family who had no one to take care of them they were responsible to do so. "Let them assist them," Paul says,

... let the church not be burdened, so that it may assist those who are real widows. {1 Tim 5:16b RSV}

Brief as it is, three times in this passage the apostle has underscored the responsibility to take care of older people. It is not always necessary to have them live in the home, though that is the usual and probably the best relationship, but sometimes physical requirements might mean that they be taken care of elsewhere.

It is also clear, as William Barclay points out in his commentary on this passage, that this lays a responsibility not only on family members to take care of the older parents, but on the older parents to be the kind of people who can live at home with their younger children. There is a dual responsibility here. Sometimes older parents can be so crotchety, grouchy, complaining, and interfering that it is not possible for them to live in the home. Scripture allows for adjustment of these principles to fit the situation; each family must decide for itself. But basically it is clearly underscored that it is the privilege, indeed the responsibility of families to take care of their older parents.

We see this again in Verse 4:

If a widow has children or grandchildren, let them first learn their religious duty to their own family and make some return to their parents; for this is acceptable in the sight of God. {1 Tim 5:4 RSV}

God is interested always in the helpless, the weak, the lonely, the discouraged; and one of the major obligations of Christians is to minister to those needs. That is why the church exists; that is why Christian love has entered into our lives, that we might meet the needs of those who would otherwise be neglected, lonely, despairing. The apostle says it is something God is pleased with. Also it is only fair return for those years when the children were helpless and their mothers and fathers dedicated themselves to taking care of them, getting nothing back from the children at all.

Verse 8 adds some steel to this:

If any man does not provide for his relatives, and especially for his own family, he has disowned the faith and is worse than an unbeliever. {1 Tim 5:8 RSV}

That is a hard word. Such a man is not living like a Christian at all. The secular writings of this 1st century show that in the Roman, the Greek and the Jewish world, families were always expected to take care of their older parents. In fact, in Athens a statesman was not allowed to speak in public if he had any blot on his record in this regard; if he was not taking care of his older parents he was not allowed to perform as a politician or a statesman. It was widely accepted throughout the whole Roman world that it was a shocking and disgraceful thing to not meet the emotional needs of parents, and the financial needs, too, if necessary. So again we are reminded three times that this is the responsibility of the family, not the church.

No family action more fully reveals the glory of Christian grace than to see children lovingly supplying the needs of their older parents -- visiting them, making them feel comfortable, loved and wanted if they have to be supported outside the home, or opening their homes and allowing them to be a central part of their life. I am grateful that my wife's mother lived with us for twenty-seven years in our home, and was loved and enjoyed as part of our family during all that time. Now, because of her failing health, it is necessary for her to be in a nursing home, but we visit her very often, we never let her feel lonely and unwanted.

I have been in rest homes that were horror pits, where older people were abandoned by their families -- some of them Christian families. Month after month went by and no one went to visit these older people; they drifted off into senility. These homes, where people simply exist, are like animal cages.

There is a great ministry open to many in the congregation who have time to visit these homes and be surrogate children to older parents who have no one to look out for them. This is a wonderful, loving ministry for some to undertake.

The apostle closes by saying that God takes note of these things; he is concerned about the weak and the helpless.

It is interesting to observe today that economic conditions are now forcing families to face up to these obligations. On the *Today Show* the other day, a family from the Midwest was interviewed. The children had grown up and established their own homes, while the parents were living alone in the big old house. The house was too big for the parents to keep up and they were contemplating selling it, but then economic pressure began to force the children, who had moved away, to find some way of solving their problems. They all ended up mutually agreeing to move back into the old home -- the parents, children, and grandchildren. They worked out loving arrangements -- a certain part of the house was kept free for the grandparents to escape to when the clutter and noise became too much. This family recaptured elements that were lost by the independent desire of each family to have a home of its own.

We have lost so much of the interrelationships between generations. God is forcing us, by economic means, to face up again to the need to live together and to enjoy one another.

That probably accounts, primarily, for the long-running success of *The Waltons*, the story of an entire family -- grandmother, grandfather, father, mother and children -- all living together. There is nothing more beautiful in this world than a family that has learned how to love and live together. It is God's masterpiece.

This is what the apostle is urging and seeking to preserve in this 1st century, and what, by principle, we ought to learn to preserve in our day as well.

Every family has to face these problems, and work them out as best they can, in terms of their own situation. No one has a right to judge others in this area. Let us look to God to give us wisdom to know what to do and how to do it, so that we might make the family a central part of our nation's life again.

Title: The Care and Feeding of Widows

By: Ray C. Stedman

Series: Studies in First Timothy

Scripture: 1 Tim 5:1-16

Message No: 14

Catalog No: 3777

Date: Unknown Date in 1981

HELP FOR ELDERS

by Ray C. Stedman

In this section from First Timothy 5 the Apostle Paul again turns to admonitions and instructions concerning the elders of a church. Many of you will never be elders, so you are already thinking, "This is not for me; it's boring stuff." But remember that, in these passages, the apostle is dealing with the divinely-given machinery for the proper functioning of a church.

As we have already seen in Chapter 3 of this letter, a church that is functioning as its Lord intends is a uniquely powerful body. Paul calls such a church, "the dwelling place of God and the pillar and bulwark of the truth." This is where you find God in any age; it is where God lives. A church is also the display base for and the defense of the truth in a confused and bewildered world; it is where the mistaken and illusive ideas of men are corrected. I am not talking about a building; I am talking about people -- it is people who are led by elders. So to give our attention to elders is an important matter.

To get a church operating as it ought to is more important than maintaining good schools, or electing strong officials to office, or building a sound economic base in this country; it is far more important than developing our natural resources or controlling crime. All of those things are very important; millions of dollars and many, many hours are devoted to them, yet with all my heart I say that they are less important than getting a church functioning the way it ought to.

History confirms that, if a church functions the way it ought, all of the things above will begin to occur. This nation is testimony to that fact among the nations of the world. Because a nucleus of godly men and women sought to walk righteously before God, all the things that we say make up the genuine American way of life -- as far as that has been in existence -- have followed.

So here are Paul's instructions to young Timothy about elders. Chapter 5, Verse 17:

Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in preaching and teaching; for the scripture says, "You shall not muzzle an ox when it is treading out the grain," and, "The laborer deserves his wages. {1 Tim 5:17-18 RSV}

Paul is clearly referring to those whom he called *bishops* in Chapter 3 of this letter. There *bishops* means "overseers," "those in oversight." That is also what the elders were. The word *elder* refers to the man -- his maturity, his experience, etc.; the word *bishop* or *overseer* refers to his work. An elder is to exercise oversight, to be aware of what is happening in a congregation and be concerned about it.

It is unfortunate that the word *rule* is used here about an elder's work: "Let the elders who rule well..." That word implies that these men are bosses, that they are somehow in charge, that they are lords or governors in a congregation. But actually the word

is, *leads* ; it is the common word for *leadership* : "Let the elders who lead well be worthy of double honor."

One who leads is not necessarily a boss. He does not drive people, he leads them. He goes before and sets the pace and the direction; whether people follow or not depends entirely upon how much respect he has built in their eyes by his personal character, his abilities, and his gifts. An elder is a man who is able to command the respect of others and get them to follow him in the directions the Lord has set.

On reading this passage some people have felt that there are two classes of elders. Some churches divide them into ruling elders and teaching elders because Paul says, "Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in preaching and teaching." But this verse does not necessarily imply that there are two classes of elders. There is really only one class: All elders are to preach and teach. In fact, in Verse 2 of Chapter 3 one of the qualifications listed for an elder is that he be "apt to teach." An elder is an apt teacher; that is how a pastor or an elder leads a congregation. The Scriptures set the direction of life, and unless an elder is preaching or teaching from the Scriptures, he is not doing any leading. That is what constitutes the work of an elder, so all elders are to preach and to teach.

But some labor in this. Some devote long hours to extensive preparation, and they teach often; they hardly have time left to earn a living in other ways. The apostle says that, "those who labor at preaching and teaching," who have the skills, the gifts and the abilities to do this, are to be given "double honor." Honor (respect) is to be given to all elders and pastors -- that is the first honor.

Remuneration is the second. They are to be paid. Their needs, their expenses, their salaries are to be paid in order to free them to do the work of preaching and teaching. People often ask where we get this business of paying preachers and teachers. Some people think because the Apostle Paul made tents as he traveled around, that preachers should never be paid. But here is the basis for pastors' salaries: if they are occupied fully in this work of preaching and teaching the Scriptures, so that people understand them, then they are to be given this double honor.

The apostle lists some Scriptural evidence in support of this. He goes back to the Law, to the book of Deuteronomy, and quotes what Moses said: "You shall not muzzle an ox when it is treading out the grain," {cf, Deut 25:4}. That was a requirement in Israel. In those days, when the threshing of grain was done by oxen which walked around on the grain to thresh out the sheaves they were not permitted to be muzzled. The oxen were working, so they deserved to eat. Paul also quotes this verse in First Corinthians, saying in that connection, "Does God care for oxen? Is that why he said that?" "No," Paul says, "he wrote that for us," {1 Cor 9:9-10}.

(When Martin Luther quoted this verse, he asked the question, "Does God care for oxen?" "No, of course not," he said, "because oxen can't read." It was written for us, not for the oxen.)

That is a very important principle to remember in reading the Old Testament. All those regulations that were given to Israel concerning their diet, their work, their clothing, etc., were not given to them only, they were given for us. They are pictures of what God is teaching us. If you read the Old Testament with that in mind, you will have a whole new book before you.

The principle Paul is getting at is that those who labor deserve their wages. In fact, he quotes these words of Jesus, "The laborer deserves his wages," from Luke 10 {Luke 10:7 RSV}.

That is interesting. That means that either the Gospel of Luke was already in existence then and Paul quotes from it a word from the Lord and calls it Scripture, or it means that this was a word spoken by the Lord which was widely circulated orally at that time, and Paul refers to it as the Lord's own confirmation of this principle.

On the other hand, if a pastor or an elder is not teaching and feeding the flock, then it is wrong to support him; let him work for a living like everyone else. But if he is teaching and feeding the flock give him the time to do so; that is the idea. Here at Peninsula Bible Church, we pay the pastors because we set them aside for this work. But those who do preaching and teaching (all elders are to do that), and yet earn a living we call elders. We distinguish between pastors and elders in that sense. But if you understand that all elders are pastors, then you will get at the heart of what this passage is saying.

Paul now takes up the delicate matter of the discipline of elders when they misbehave. Verse 19:

Never admit any charge against an elder except on the evidence of two or three witnesses. As for those who persist in sin, rebuke them in the presence of all, so that the rest may stand in fear. {1 Tim 5:19-20 RSV}

Charges against elders must be supported by more than one person. That is because elders and pastors are in public view, and oftentimes they have to say unpleasant things to people. They do not have to say them unpleasantly, of course. Sometimes people strike back; they try to get even -- sometimes by slandering or starting rumors.

Not long ago I received a call from a young pastor who had been summarily dismissed by his board of elders. Charges had been leveled against him by a member of the congregation, who, it turned out later, was actually his personal secretary. She was angry at him about something, and she typed a letter that had shattering implications of very serious charges against the pastor and presented this letter to the elders as though it were something the pastor had received. Later, she confessed that she had written this herself. The letter resulted in the elders calling the young man in, and, without any further confirmation, relieving him of his responsibilities. This was a crushing blow to him, but God used it in his life and enabled him to survive it. That is the kind of thing this verse is designed to eliminate. Do not entertain a charge against an elder unless it is supported by two or three witnesses.

When a charge is confirmed and the elder repents, no public action is necessary. But if he persists (that is the next word), then a public rebuke is required: "As for those who persist in sin, rebuke them in the presence of all, so that the rest may stand in fear."

Reference is here being made to what our Lord said in Matthew 18, that well-known passage on church discipline. Jesus himself said, "If your brother sins against you, go to him and tell him his fault, between you and him alone; and if he repents, you have gained your brother," {cf, Matt 18:15}. Nothing more need to be said, that settles it. That kind of thing ought to be going on in a congregation all the time. It does here. But, Jesus continued, "If he does not hear you, then take two or three more and go to him again and try to lay hold of his conscience with their help. If he does not hear them, then tell it to the church," {cf, Matt 18:16-17a}. That is a public rebuke -- a difficult but very important thing to do. A church that does not do that when it is required is bound to lose its witness; its effectiveness as a church peters away to nothing.

This would be a very delicate matter for a young man like Timothy to handle. Timothy is an apostolic representative. He is not an elder; he is not a pastor either, although in certain other passages in this letter he is addressed as though he were, and I am sure he did act in that capacity. But here he is acting as a substitute, a surrogate, for the Apostle Paul. We do not have surrogate apostles today because when the New Testament was written -- this very letter is a case in point -- they became no longer necessary. The Scriptures have taken the place of these apostolic representatives in the early church. Today any concerned individual who sees from the Scriptures that things are out of line is responsible to call these things to the attention of the leaders of the church, and press for action if need be. We have the Word of the Living God constantly judging the church and correcting us. This is why the Scriptures were given.

Because of Timothy's delicate position, Paul urges certain things upon him. These are excellent points to bear in mind if anybody is attempting to correct a congregation, or to stir the leadership of the church to action along certain lines.

First, there must be no partiality shown. Paul says:

In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus and of the elect angels I charge you to keep these rules without favor, doing nothing from partiality. {1 Tim 5:21 RSV}

It would have been very easy for Timothy to have shown partiality. He might well have had some close friends among the leaders of this church at Ephesus. He very likely did, because he was working with these men and he himself was a lonely young man. But he must not let that stand in the way of doing what was necessary if an elder got out of line. Timothy might well have felt intimidated by certain powerful personalities among the eldership at Ephesus; he might have been afraid to take them on. That can happen. Elders can be very strong-minded men. I know. I have to wrestle with them every week, as I have often described.

Timothy might well have felt inadequate, but notice whom the apostle summons to his aid, whom he says is watching: "in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus and of the elect angels." God the Father is involved. He is at work in the congregation. He knows what is going on; nothing is hid from his eyes. Christ Jesus, Lord of the church, head of the body, is present also. Jesus can work from within. He can touch men's consciences; he can get at their hearts. And the elect angels are involved, these personages whom the book of Hebrews tells us are as "ministering spirits sent forth to minister to those who shall be the heirs of salvation," {Heb 1:14 KJV}. I do not know exactly what these angels do, but it is very important and significant. Paul tells Timothy not to be intimidated. If it requires action, act -- patiently, lovingly, thoughtfully, carefully -- but act.

Then Paul gives Timothy a second admonition: choose men carefully, he says.

Do not be hasty in the laying on of hands, nor participate in another man's sins; keep yourself pure. {1 Tim 5:22 RSV}

The laying on of hands was the recognition of a man by the other elders as being chosen of the Lord. We frequently do that here. It does not confer anything; rather, it indicates that such men are the ones whom God has chosen. Paul tells Timothy to be careful, to not do that hastily.

I am always amazed at how many churches elect wealthy men to their boards merely because they are wealthy. Nobody ever seems

to ask what other qualifications these men might have. If they make money, if they are successful businessmen, it is widely regarded that *that* makes them eligible to be elders. But it does not. They may be the worst possible men to put into that office. That is why Paul says to be careful. Look for the qualifications that other Scriptures have told us to look for.

Further, Paul tells Timothy not to ignore sins and weaknesses he may find in men: "Do not participate in another man's sin but keep yourself pure." If you suggest a man for eldership, knowing that there is a weakness or a sin in his life that he is not dealing with, when he is made an elder you have participated in his sin; you have gone along with it.

Sometimes men are put into office without any special care being exercised. The apostle suggests that Timothy be very careful at this point. It is so easy to say, "He's such a nice guy. He's so effective in his business. I know he's a bit greedy and he wheels and deals all the time, but he probably won't do that here with us." Be careful, because you are becoming a participator in other men's sins.

A man said to me recently about an elder in another church: "He's a good man and he's almost honest." That does not qualify a man as an elder. An elder ought to be an honest man, not almost so.

The third admonition the apostle gives is a rather strange one. Verse 23:

No longer drink only water, but use a little wine for the sake of your stomach and your frequent ailments. {1 Tim 5:23 RSV}

This admonition seems to be out of place in this context. Paul suddenly shifts from talking about choosing elders to a personal word to Timothy. I myself thought so for quite awhile, but now I think I see what Paul is getting at. Paul's previous word to Timothy was, "keep yourself pure." Timothy wanted very much to do that. He was obviously a dedicated young man who would willingly set aside anything in his personal life in order that his ministry might be right.

In writing this, Paul very likely was reminded of something about Timothy that he felt needed correction. Timothy, evidently, was leaning too far toward total abstinence from wine. We know there was a lot of public drunkenness in Ephesus at that time. The reaction of almost all Christians to public drunkenness is, "I don't want anything to do with that."

There has sprung up in the church a widespread attitude that the Christian position about drinking should be one of total abstinence; that no Christian ought to drink at all. But that completely sets aside the record of the Scriptures that our Lord drank wine, and so did the apostles.

Paul is evidently warning Timothy about total abstinence, especially because it was affecting his health. Timothy had not taken a balanced position. Paul warns him, "For your health's sake, don't do this."

So Paul warns him against drinking the water! If you have traveled abroad in some countries where water is not drinkable, you know what Timothy was going through. He was suffering from what has been called "the Gruts" (for lack of a more descriptive term), or the "Mexican Quickstep." Paul is warning him to use a little wine to prevent that.

Years ago I was speaking to missionaries in Costa Rica, and they were telling me about stomach problems they had been having. They said that a few months earlier Dr. Donald Grey Barnhouse had come down from Philadelphia and they had told him about this. Dr. Barnhouse said, "The problem is that you missionaries don't believe your Bible. If you did you wouldn't have these troubles." Then he quoted this verse, "Stop drinking the water but use a little wine for your stomach's sake," and added, "If you would do what the apostle said to do you wouldn't have this problem." He was right -- that was the problem. Wine does prevent stomach upsets, dysentery, etc. Paul is suggesting to Timothy that he use wine to prevent this.

I have heard some very tortured exegeses of this passage. Years ago, in Texas, I heard a young man seek to expound this verse. He was reading from the King James Version, which says, "Drink no longer water, but use a little wine for thy stomach's sake." This preacher's incredible exegesis was that there were two kinds of liquid referred to here: there was wine (which was really grape juice), and there was what he called "longer water," which was liquor. According to him, the apostle's admonition is, "Stop drinking that 'longer water' (Drink no longer water), but use a little wine for your stomach's sake." That is the kind of trouble you get into when you work with the English text. A little knowledge is a dangerous thing.

This is best stated by E. F. Brown, in an excellent summary of what the text is saying:

The text shows that while total abstinence may be recommended as wise counsel, it is never to be enforced as a religious obligation.

The last point the apostle makes is that Timothy ought to observe men over a period of time:

The sins of some men are conspicuous, pointing to judgment, but the sins of others appear later. So also good deeds are conspicuous; and even when they are not, they cannot remain hidden. {1 Tim 5:24-25 RSV}

That is a wise word. God was at work in that congregation in Ephesus, Paul is saying, and he was bringing to light things that were hidden. That is what Jesus does. He said, "A time is coming when that which is done in secret shall be shouted from the housetops; that which is spoken in the closet shall be heralded in the streets." Everybody is going to know about it. God takes hidden sins and brings them to light. Many a man thinks he is hiding his sins but he is not. God is steadily working to bring those sins to public exposure. There are some men whose sins are conspicuous, and it is obvious they are heading for God's judgment. You would not elect them or appoint them to any office.

But they are not the only kind, the apostle says. Some men are skillful at hiding sin. They appear to be very dedicated, committed people, but there is rotten evil in their hearts all the time. If you get into the habit of electing people to office or appointing them into some responsible position without giving time to observe them you will get into trouble. "Time will tell," the world's proverb says. Let some time go by. God will bring it out. Get close to them. The closer you get the more obvious their evil will become.

But it works the other way too. Some men appear retiring and quiet, yet they may be very good men. Such men may make the very best elders. So do not rush men into leadership. If they have something good going on quietly in their lives, even when these are not conspicuous, Paul says, they cannot remain hidden. God will bring it all out if you get close to them. Abraham Lincoln's famous dictum, "You can fool all of the people some of the time, and some of the people all of the time, but you can't fool all of the people all of the time," is a wise word in choosing elders.

All this concerns how God's church functions, and it is very important that the church function as God intended it. I rejoice that in many places people are again taking very seriously what the Scriptures say about the church and church government; they are trying to correct the things that have crept in by tradition through the years.

May God help us to understand that when his church functions as it ought to, it is an awesome power to correct and heal the life of a whole area.

May he grant that we will be that kind of a church.

Prayer

Lord, we thank you for your concern for your church, for what you have envisioned it to be and for what you are ready to make it to be, as men and women are willing to obey you and walk in the power of your Spirit. Grant to us to live in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus and of the elect angels that we, in this twentieth century hour, may be the kind of church you came into the world to produce. We ask in Jesus name, Amen.

Title: Help for Elders
By: Ray C. Stedman
Series: Studies in First Timothy
Scripture: 1 Tim 5:17-25
Message No: 15
Catalog No: 3778
Date: November 8, 1981

SOUND WORDS FOR SLAVES

by Ray C. Stedman

At the time the Apostle Paul wrote his first letter to Timothy, half the population of the Roman Empire -- about sixty million people -- were slaves. Many of them had been taken as prisoners of war by the Roman legions. Some were taken away out of their own countries, while others were kept captive within their own lands. Some slaves were highly educated, literate men and women. A few of them became secretaries to leading Romans and others, but most of them were illiterate, as were many of the Romans.

Slavery, then, became an immediate problem in the early church, as both slaves and their masters were being converted to Christianity. Many of you are probably feeling that this is not very relevant to us today. We no longer have slavery in this country, nor do most of the countries of the world practice slavery. Yet you will discover that this is a very relevant passage. The

principles stated here apply, for instance, in employer-employee relationships or in any situation in which one is expected to work under someone else or for someone else.

Many of you here this morning are "wage slaves," you work for wages. You have made an agreement to sell a portion of your time and labor to some company or employer, and you receive a certain sum of money in return. You are functioning as a servant or a slave for that period of time. You are a lot better off than the slaves of the New Testament times. You get paid for your work, but they did not get paid anything; they worked only for their room and board and a few pieces of clothing now and then. You are able to take the weekend off. At the end of the week you can say, "Thank God it's Friday," but they could not; they were slaves twenty-four hours a day for their entire lifetime, with very little hope of ever being freed again.

So the question, "What does the Lord say to slaves?" arose in the early church. And it comes home to us yet today, "What is the Lord saying to us in these relationships where we work for someone else?" Here are the apostle's words, First Timothy 6, Verse 1:

Let all who are under the yoke of slavery regard their masters as worthy of all honor, so that the name of God and the teaching may not be defamed. Those who have believing masters must not be disrespectful on the ground that they are brethren; rather they must serve all the better since those who benefit by their service are believers and beloved.

Teach and urge these duties. {1 Tim 6:1-2 RSV}

Many people today are troubled by the fact the New Testament does not denounce slavery; in fact, it seems to accommodate to it. Passages like this sound as though slavery is accepted and acceptable in a Christian relationship. People ask, "How can a religion of freedom and liberty ignore conditions of slavery imposed upon a people against their will?" Many have felt that Scripture is not relevant to life because it seems to treat this question with such indifference.

But the truth is that, though Scripture does not denounce slavery, neither does it approve of it. There is no defense of slavery in Scripture; there is no attempt made to perpetuate it in any degree. In fact, although there were sixty million slaves in the Roman Empire at the time this letter was written, by the end of the second century slavery had widely disappeared, largely because of the impact of Christian teaching and influence of Christians throughout the Empire. So it is apparent that, though Scripture does not come out in strong language against the institution of slavery, nevertheless, Christianity is the major reason why slavery has disappeared around the world.

This is true in modern times as well. History will vindicate the fact that even those nations that practiced slavery in the last century -- including our own -- came to enlightenment and finally settled the issue (either with or without violence), on the basis of the teachings of Christ. Christianity has historically proven to be the major factor that sets men free. When Paul wrote to the Galatians, and said, "In Christ there is neither bond nor free" {Gal 3:28 KJV}, he laid the foundation for a reaction in the Christian churches that would ultimately deliver the world from the curse of slavery.

The process was never to be one of armed revolt, even of strikes or boycotts or riots. Rather, it was by obedience to words such as these in Paul's letter to Timothy, where it was laid upon both Christian slaves and Christian masters to look at each other in a different way and to treat each other with honor and respect even though the institution of slavery continued. Slaves were to look to God to change the practice.

The great principle, of course, is the belief that God is in charge of life. If slaves did not believe that God determines the affairs of men they had no hope. He lifts the load of bondage and frees people; or, in other ways and at other times, allows a once free people to go into bondage. God does that on the basis of the reaction of human beings to the Word of truth which he has caused to be spread among us. Christian slaves in the 1st century church were expected to treat their masters with respect and honor. They believed that God would then work to change the situation (when and where it could be changed), and finally to bring about freedom without violence.

God, after all, has announced himself in Scripture as committed to human freedom. He does not like slavery; he speaks against it both in the Old and the New Testaments. He declares himself on the side of those who are oppressed, those who are in captivity. But God also has his timing and his way of bringing about change. These words in the Scriptures reflect the fact that God moves in different ways than we think. When Christians obey what he says, then God acts -- more slowly, perhaps, than we think he ought to.

That is one of my problems with God. I am always wishing he would act more quickly and take advantage of some of the opportunities that I can clearly see to change situations overnight. Almost weekly I propose solutions to him which he seems to ignore. This, of course, is because he sees far more than I do. He is working on far greater problems than I see involved; he is manipulating and moving millions of people whose intimate lives are involved. Only God can work those out.

We have a great lesson in this regard in the Scriptures in the story of Joseph, the favorite son of Jacob, who was sold into slavery in Egypt by his own brothers. Joseph was a brilliant, well-educated, young Hebrew lad, yet he became a slave in an Egyptian household. There he served faithfully until he fell into further trouble, which was not his fault. He was accused by the wife of his master of assaulting her, and was thrown into prison. He must have been tempted to feel attacked, humiliated, and bitter that God would allow this to happen to him when he was doing everything he could to be a godly man. Joseph was a normal young man. He was subjected to temptations just like any of us would be, yet he found grace to wait on God's time, believing that God was working things out and would change the situation.

That is exactly what happened. Joseph dreamed his dreams and it looked like his circumstances were going to change even before they finally did. But two years later God worked it out and he was released from prison and given the very highest position in the Egyptian government.

This is a lesson for us of how God works. Unless we have that clearly in mind, there is no hope that we can ever act in a godly way in an unrighteous situation in our own day. Some of you have tyrants for bosses. I have worked for such men myself. You want to punch them out every day you go to work. They irritate you, they frustrate you, you see them as ignoramuses who do not know the end from the beginning; how they ever got the job in the first place you cannot believe. Yet there they are in charge; they have you in a stranglehold because they control your paycheck. The word of Scripture is that you are not merely to treat them with respect, but that you "regard them as worthy of respect," worthy of honor.

Everything is going to rest upon how you feel about them. If you think they are ding-a-lings who are unworthy of your respect, then no matter how polite you may be when they are watching, your attitude toward them will be one of bitterness and resentment; you will be constantly trying to find ways to goof off and justify it, because of their attitude toward you. But Scripture says, "regard them as worthy of respect" -- no matter what they are like, no matter how they treat you. Why? Because they are made in the image of God. Just like you, when God's grace touches them, they are capable of reflecting his glory and beauty; they are the potential bearers of God himself, so they are to be treated with respect.

The Bible never looks at man as being wretched and worthless. It sometimes uses language like that, but then it is only reflecting the language of human beings who think that way. The Bible's view is that man is God's creation, made in God's image, and, though he has fallen, he is not worthless; he is the victim of a supernatural, malevolent being who holds him in unwitting control and feeds him all this vileness, evil, anger, hostility, etc. If you regard mankind as a victim, you can see the individual as worthy of respect and honor because of what God has made him to be -- a man or woman for whom Christ died. This is how Christian slaves were to regard their masters in this 1st century day. If they were unbelieving masters, slaves were still to look upon them as "worthy of respect," in order that the name of the God who created them and stamped his image upon them might not be defamed, or his teachings scorned by the world.

The Satanic view of man is exactly the opposite. Satan thinks men are worthless; he regards them with scorn and despising. When you think of people as worthless and useless, you treat them that way; you talk about them that way, you curse them, ridicule them and use language about them that is disparaging, and depersonalizing. When you do that you are reflecting Satan's view of man. Whether slaves or masters, Christians are to treat each other and all other men as "worthy of respect," and not use language like that, lest the name of God be defamed.

What about those slaves who had believing masters? Such a slave might well feel, "Christ has made us one, and, since we're brothers, my master should no longer treat me as a slave but as his brother. That means I have a right to special favors, a special position in the household, etc." Some of these slaves in Ephesus were doing that. But Paul says (Verse 2):

Those who have believing masters must not be disrespectful on the ground that they are brethren; rather they must serve all the better since those who benefit by their service are believers and beloved. {1 Tim 6:2a RSV}

That is a wholly different attitude. I am always amazed at the attitudes some Christians have when they do business with other Christians. They seem to feel that the fact that they are buying something from a Christian businessman means that he ought to give them a discount or favor, or treat them in a different way than he would any other customer. Some men have told me that they hate to see a Christian come into their stores because they know they are going to be asked for some special favor. I do not know what it is about some Christians that makes them think that way, but it reveals that they are using Christianity to their own advantage.

Paul turns this idea around. He says, rather than thinking you deserve special favors because of your Christianity, you ought to remember that these men are your brothers. You ought to be trying to find a way to bless them and go beyond what others would do in your courtesy and respect toward them. You do not have to pay them more than you would anyone else, but you ought to treat them with additional courtesy because they are brothers, "believers and beloved."

I have been embarrassed at times by certain Christians who actually asked for discounts in stores because they were Christians. I

have been in stores with pastors who somehow feel that pastors have a right to some special treatment from Christian merchants. It was so embarrassing I almost turned around and walked out when some of them said, "I'm a pastor. Don't you have a 10% discount for pastors?" The merchant would have been justified in saying, "No. I add on 10% when a pastor comes in here," because pastors often get a lot of advantages that others do not enjoy.

Notice that the Scriptures recognize the equality of believers before God. Paul recognizes that, "Yes, you are slaves and your masters are Christians, therefore, you are brethren," but nevertheless, the institution of slavery remained in effect until it could be changed by normal, nonviolent processes which God would effect as Christians obeyed what God wanted done.

That is how the church changes the world. I believe with all my heart that if Christians in the South 150 years ago had treated the slaves who were becoming Christians as brothers in Christ, had loved them, accepted them, and allowed them full freedom within the church, that the institution of slavery would have disappeared from these American shores without violence, without the Civil War, or the race riots that we went through a decade ago. It is the church that is to blame. It is only as Christians reflect these words and these activities that God moves to change society.

I know these are hard words for the flesh to hear. There is nothing more difficult, especially to a young person, than the words, "wait," or "submit," or "accept," or, the hardest of all, "trust God." Those are hard words; our flesh does not bear them easily, and so it was in Ephesus. I am sure Timothy would be hard put to get everybody in the congregation there to accept these teachings. That is why Paul says, "Teach and urge these duties."

So, recognizing that there would be some among them who would not accept this, Paul tells Timothy what to do. Verse 3:

If any one teaches otherwise and does not agree with the sound words of our Lord Jesus Christ and the teaching which accords with godliness, he is puffed up with conceit, he knows nothing; he has a morbid craving for controversy and for disputes about words, which produce envy, dissension, slander, base suspicions, and wrangling among men who are depraved in mind and bereft of the truth, imagining that godliness is a means of gain.
{1 Tim 6:3-5 RSV}

Paul says there will be some who will not accept this; in fact, they will stand up and teach the contrary. But when they do, remember two things about them:

First, their actions are wrong; they are opposing "the sound words of our Lord Jesus Christ" (Verse 3). Paul takes us back to the Lord himself.

It is always helpful for us to remember that these words about submission, acceptance, and showing a proper attitude in the face of persecution or injustice -- loving your enemies and blessing those who persecute you -- do not come from the apostles but from the Lord Jesus; it is he who tells us to live this way. Paul calls these words, "the sound words of our Lord Jesus Christ." These are realistic words that reflect the reality of life. These are the kind of words that will smooth things out without violence and disruption in society.

Our Lord understands life. He ordained it, he set up the rules. When Jesus tells us to live this way, it is not merely an option that we are offered, which we can do if we like and ignore if we do not. If we do not do what he says, we create havoc and disturbance in families, in communities, in states and in nations. These are the "sound words of our Lord Jesus Christ." To teach or to try to impart another basis of activity is to take an opposite view to the Lord himself; to do so is to follow the philosophy of the devil.

Second, Paul says, those who do this ignore "the teaching which accords with godliness" (Verse 3). We have seen this word *godliness* several times in this letter. It is really the word *wholeness* -- the teaching that makes men whole, that makes them unified, that destroys division and creates unity. Jesus once said, "He that is with me gathers. He that is against me scatters," {cf, Luke 11:23}. If you want to know whether a man is for or against Christ, do not listen to what he says, look at what the effect of his life is. If he divides and scatters people, then, no matter what he says, he is against Christ. Does he unite people and heal them? Then no matter how poorly he states it, he is with the Lord; he is for him. That is our Lord's test. The teaching that is in accord with wholeness is the exact opposite of the devil's philosophy, which divides men.

Those who ignore "the teaching which accords with godliness" are always doing three things in any situation of controversy. First, they are escalating it. If you teach somebody to get even, to take vengeance into his own hands when his neighbor throws garbage over the fence, by putting gophers in his lawn or throwing dirt on his washing when it is hanging out in the back yard -- your evil minds will think up plenty of things to do, as will mine -- what you are doing is immediately escalating the situation. The neighbor has to do something worse in return, and so conflict grows.

And it not only escalates, it polarizes: others join the fracas. Your neighbors, your family and others get in on the act. Soon you have one community opposed to one another, fighting one another, writing nasty letters to the newspaper, and attacking each

other.

Then third, it perpetuates the situation. I am watching a conflict right now between Christians in one church who attacked another church, calling them a cult. This has begun to escalate and to polarize, and others are being drawn into it. It is becoming a knock-down, drag-out fight in which they are airing it all on the printed page, spreading it around the country. Those are the kind of things that bring disgrace and disrepute upon the cause of Christianity.

The apostle says there are three motives that prompt one to act this way:

The first is conceit. Though he knows nothing, he thinks he knows everything, Paul says. "He is puffed up with conceit, though he knows nothing." When you listen to some of these adherents of various causes, how profound they can sound, how convinced they are that they have the only right view, and how angry they become at anybody who opposes them! This always reveals conceit.

Many, many years ago as a young Christian I was involved in a controversy between Christians. Somebody stood up in a meeting once and quoted the proverb, "Only by pride comes contention." I never forgot that. Whenever you have contention somebody is acting out of pride -- probably both sides to some degree. It is only when that pride is recognized and you are willing to lose face (which is another expression for pride) and knowledge that you are wrong, that the contention ceases.

The second motive is that there is a love of controversy, a craving for a fight. There is a definition that says, "An Irishman does not know what he believes but he is willing to die for it." Some people cannot get along unless they get a fight going. Such people come into churches and before very long they will whisper something here and then something there. Soon they have people calling each other up, and a fight begins. Then they feel good; something exciting is happening. This reveals a morbid love of controversy, of word-wrangling, and debating over the meanings of phrases and words.

The third motive is that such an individual sees gain as his only objective in life. Why is he religious? Why is he a Christian? Why is he in church? Because it is a big help in making money. It gives him a respectable position. A lot of people are involved in the church because of the honor and deference that comes from those who show a concern for religious values. Many a man has come into the church because it will advance him in his business. Paul says that is a terrible motive. It is part of the devil's philosophy. (This passage leads on to Paul's survey of the Christian position on making money, which we will take in another message.)

The apostle is saying here that submission to difficult conditions is not a curse; it is something God has given as an opportunity to display the true character of Christ. If, against the dark background, a light shines, it shines all the brighter because of the darkness. So difficult conditions are opportunities given by God to reflect a clear testimony before the world. It is God's way to blessing. He can and will change the situation. He is committed to human freedom which he will bring into being when the purpose for which he has allowed difficult conditions to arise have been fully achieved.

Remember the words of Peter concerning our Lord Jesus: "When he was reviled, he did not revile in return [He did not give back what he got]; when he suffered, he did not threaten; but he trusted to him who judges justly," (1 Peter 2:23 {RSV}). Jesus did it all at the cross. God turned the cross into the greatest opportunity for deliverance and freedom that the world has ever seen. That is what he will do in our lives as well.

This is the power of Christianity to free, to deliver from any form of slavery.

All of us are slaves in one way or another. We are bound with bad habits of eating, drinking, smoking, whatever.

All of us are slaves to habits of the emotions, such as hot tempers and lustful thoughts.

We are all slaves to attitudes of resentment and bitterness, etc.

But God can free us when we act as his children in the midst of the circumstances in which he has put us. The little sign we see frequently these days,

Bloom where you are planted!

is a great word for Christians. Are you slaves, working in difficult conditions? Then, bloom right where you are planted. Are you free, but have other kinds of problems? Then, bloom there, where God has planted you. Where he has put you is right where he wants you to be.

Think these things over, remembering that they apply to our world today as much as they did in the 1st century world.

Title: Sound Words for Slaves
By: Ray C. Stedman
Series: Studies in First Timothy
Scripture: 1 Tim 6:1-5
Message No: 16
Catalog No: 3779
Date: November 15, 1981

THE COST OF RICHES

by Ray C. Stedman

Last week a man in Brooklyn, New York, whose work was replacing light bulbs in a New York skyscraper, bought a one-dollar lottery ticket and with it won five million dollars. It would be interesting to know how many of you are saying to yourselves, "Why can't I get lucky like that?" Some of you may be saying, "What a pity! I hope nothing like that ever happens to me." The passage from First Timothy 6, which we will be looking at this morning, will help us decide which group we belong in.

This grows out of Paul's word to Timothy about certain false teachers who felt that a godly reputation was useful as a means of gain. It introduces this very practical section on the Christian view of wealth.

Beginning with Verse 6, Paul plunges right into the heart of the matter by showing us what true wealth is.

There is great gain in godliness with contentment; for we brought nothing into the world, and we cannot take anything out of the world; but if we have food and clothing, with these we shall be content. {1 Tim 6:6-8 RSV}

Twice in that passage the apostle says that contentment is true wealth -- not possessions, not new cars or new homes, not a comfortable environment -- but contentment; there is where true wealth lies. It is clear in this passage that contentment comes from a whole and balanced life. As we have already seen many times in this letter, that is what godliness (the Greek word, *eusebia*) means -- goodness, balance, wholeness. That wholeness produces a contented heart.

There is a twisted and distorted view of Christianity frequently heard today -- especially on religious television -- that says that, when you become a Christian, God goes to work for you to make you wealthy, and if you are not rich as a Christian there is something wrong with your faith. In Texas the sign of being rich is owning a Cadillac; here on the West Coast it is a Porsche, while on the East Coast it is a Mercedes. If you are not driving a Cadillac, a Porsche, or a Mercedes, obviously you are a weak-faithed individual, because (according to that view of Christianity), God blesses Christians, and wealth is the sign of blessing. People who think like this would quote Proverbs 3:5 this way: "Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and lean not unto your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will bring you good luck." That widely-held view is clearly denounced in this passage; to hold it is to adopt the very view that Paul says the false teachers were advocating, i.e. that godliness is a means of gain.

The truth is, as Paul goes on to say, that wholeness, balanced realism, richness of soul and spirit -- godliness -- is in itself gain. That is the true wealth; it brings contented hearts, which is what we are all looking for. One of the great problems of this age, with its crass materialism, its blatant hedonism, is that we are a rootless, restless people. We are always looking for some anesthetic to deaden the pain of an empty life. We look with envy upon contented people.

Of course, it all depends upon how you define contentment. Some people think that contentment means getting everything they want as soon as they want it. Most of us know that that is not true. We have lived long enough to know that those who live that way are not content at all. One of the best definitions of contentment that I have heard is, "not having all you want but wanting only what you have." Satisfied with what you have -- that is being content. The Greek word used here in this passage means self-sufficiency, having all you need and wanting only that much, not craving for more.

But there is even more to it than that. The word is best defined by the Apostle Paul in that famous passage in Philippians 4: "I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therein to be content," {Phil 4:11 RSV}. Then Paul goes on, "I have learned both to be abased [to live without anything]; I have learned to abound [to have all I need] ... I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and want," {cf, Phil 4:12 RSV}. The next verse tells us the secret: "I can do all things through him who strengthens me," {Phil 4:13 RSV}.

Godliness, in other words, is contentment. True godliness is understanding that when you have God, and food, and clothing, that is all you really need to be enriched and fulfilled, satisfied and content. That is the clear teaching of the Scriptures. So the first

thing this passage teaches us is that things do not make us happy. Jesus said that: "a person's life does not consist of the abundance of things which he possesses" {cf, Luke 12:15}, yet it is amazing how many of us read that and add, "except for me."

Paul goes on to prove the truth of these words by using birth and death as examples. He says we came into the world with nothing, and we can take nothing out of it. What do you have when you are born? Nothing. You come into the world a little red-faced, squally, naked baby. You do not have anything; even your diaper has to be furnished. What do you have when you leave this world? Nothing. You leave it all behind.

Years ago I picked up a young hitchhiker. As he was telling me about himself, he said, "My uncle died a millionaire." I said, "No, he didn't." "What do you mean?" he said. "You don't know my uncle." I said, "Who's got the million now?" "Oh," he said, "I see what you mean." Nobody dies a millionaire. We all die paupers; we leave it all behind.

Bob Roe tells me he is going to take his Ping golf clubs with him to glory. He has it all worked out to have them put in the casket with him. I keep telling him that, in heaven, nobody hits a bad golf shot so the game will be so boring nobody will want to play it!

The apostle says all we need is food and clothing -- provision for the maintenance of life (food), and protection from the elements that would destroy life (shelter and clothing). God provides those for us, and with that simple lifestyle man can be content. That is what Jesus meant when he said, "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God," {Matt 4:4 RSV}. It is the knowledge of God that gives contentment; it is fellowship with the Lord of Glory that makes the heart rejoice, giving us peace and a sense of worth and security. That is the true contentment, Paul says.

But I want to be very practical about this: It is hard to live at that basic, fundamental lifestyle. The reason is, primarily, because we are bombarded ceaselessly with powerful appeals to buy this, send for that, borrow from the future to live in the present; we are encouraged to collect generous rebates, to believe that we all deserve much better than we are getting and that we can get it wholesale anyhow. All these subtle encouragements are pressed upon us hour-by-hour, day-by-day, in every magazine and newspaper, on every radio and television program, in every store window. Nothing is more universal than the propaganda to possess more things. Christians are up against a tough assignment when they are called, not to make that their objective in life. The whole world has made that their objective. If we do not watch, and keep alert, we will succumb to this pressure without even knowing it.

How can we resist? Consider carefully these words:

But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation, into a snare, into many senseless and hurtful desires that plunge men into ruin and destruction. {1 Tim 6:9 RSV}

Here, Paul is telling us how, in every age, this subtle peril lays hold of our hearts:

First, it comes in the form of simple temptation. Open a magazine and there is a picture, in living beautiful color, of a gorgeous automobile. It makes you drool to look at it. Walk into the airport, and it is sitting right in the lobby. You can go up and rub it, feel it, slobber over it. Your neighbors have one sitting in their driveway. Every Sunday morning they are out worshipping it, bowing down to it, lifting up its hood, feeding it all kinds of expensive things.

That is temptation, and that is what we are up against. It creates in us a hunger to have one like it. We all feel the force and power of this. It looks so natural, especially when we are constantly being told that we deserve this; we are this kind of people. It is amazing how easily we can convince ourselves that we, like everybody else, have a right to have these things. That is temptation.

But that is not the worst. There is another stage. Paul says that those who want to be rich "fall into a snare." Notice where the emphasis is: It is on the desire to be rich. It is the love of money, not money, that is the root of all evil. That is the most misquoted verse in America. We hear all the time that money is the root of all evil, but it is not. Money is a very necessary commodity in life; it is impossible to get along without using money in one form or another. It is "the love of money" that the Scripture is talking about, the desire to have more and more and more of it, the craving for riches, the constant planning of how to get another buck.

You say, "What is a young man with a family supposed to do? Isn't he supposed to try to provide for them?" Yes, he is, but what is his objective? Is it to make money, or is it to be a good, faithful worker, using his gifts and abilities to the fullest degree for the glory of God in the scene in which he is placed? That is something the world never thinks about.

Paul says that when you fall into temptation, and give way to this lust for more things, you create a snare for yourself. By that, he means that your possessions will soon begin to possess you. Everyone who has had any success in obtaining some of the things they desired soon discovers this. I am sure many of you could bear testimony to this. As soon as you get a shiny new car, an expensive gadget, a new home with all its comfort, etc., it immediately introduces a whole new range of worries. You have to

get insurance on it, you have to buy locks to make sure that it is not taken away from you, you must be available many times when you would rather be away, because your possessions demand that you take care of them.

Possessions also change your relationship with others. You discover that people are treating you differently because you have something that is a symbol of prestige or status. People no longer treat you for who you are; they are treating you for what you have, so you begin to get suspicious of your friends and your friendships. You can even get involved in court cases, lawsuits, etc. All this enters when the love of money starts to possess you. That is the snare involved.

Second, the apostle says, such people fall into "senseless and hurtful desires"; damaging things happen to them and to those they love.

For years I have been hearing about the television show, *Dallas*. The whole world was agog for awhile with the desire to know who shot J. R. Ewing. I had never seen the program, so the other night I decided to watch it and see what it is all about. It was an amazingly apt time to do so because the show illustrated exactly what I am talking about this morning.

Last week's episode told of J. R.'s son, who had left him and gone off to live with J. R.'s business rival. J. R. was trying to force his son to come home. Not understanding anything about personal relationships, the only way he had of doing this was to put on the squeeze by applying financial pressure. As the situation unfolded, some of the results of J. R.'s heartless, cruel actions became apparent. One of the family members was driven to the very edge of suicide; another faced financial ruin; J. R.'s mother despised him. The episode ended up with J. R. looking very solemn, dimly aware that somehow he had made everybody unhappy.

The love of money encourages cruelty, callousness, neglect and shameful indulgence. People get involved in things they never dreamed they would do, all in the name of power, or greed, or pleasure. Ron Ritchie told me that just last week he talked to a man who had lost a huge sum of money. When Ron asked how it happened, the man's answer was, "Through greed. I turned down the street called Greed and I just kept right on going." "Senseless and hurtful desires that plunge men into ruin and destruction," the apostle says.

Paul lists the final results in Verse 10:

For the love of money is the root of all evils; it is through this craving that some have wandered away from the faith and pierced their hearts with many pangs. {1 Tim 6:10 RSV}

When you are living to be rich, breathing it every day, working at it as your great objective, that, Paul says, is a deep root of evil in your life. You know what a root is. If you find a big, luxuriant weed growing in your back yard and you cut it down, although it looks like you have gotten rid of the weed you have not because the root is still there. After a while the root will send forth another shoot, and if you are not Johnny-on-the-spot, soon there will be another weed the same size or bigger than the first one. That is what the love of money is like, the apostle is saying. You can eliminate some of the problems that it creates but there will be another one along very shortly, because the root is still there, constantly producing evil in your life, creating situations that are disastrous to you and to others.

The second thing the love of money causes, the apostle says, is a "wandering from the faith." I can name at least half-a-dozen young men and women from this congregation who, when they first started out, were eager young Christians, committed to understanding the Word of God, dedicated to the Lord. But then they went away to school or they got involved in some prestigious training program and ended up with a well-paying job, and turned away from the faith. They lost the center of life, the very purpose of living, forgetting the God who is behind all things. The love of money drives us away from the faith.

The final result is that such people have "pierced their hearts with many pangs," Paul says. Some of the Hollywood idols have confessed what was going on privately in their lives when the public thought they were happy, beautiful people. Elvis Presley was the king of rock and roll. He was idolized by millions, admired and held up as the example of success to follow. Now it is known that he died a bloated, pitiful wreck of a man, unable to live a few moments without shooting himself up with drugs.

There comes a day when a final realization dawns on those who give themselves to the amassing of riches -- they finally come to the place where they have to give it all up. They can take nothing away, Paul says. What must be the awful feeling of an individual who awakens at last to the realization that his whole life has been lived for nothing! He has to leave everything to others to waste and spend as they like. He goes before the God of Glory with absolutely nothing to show for living. That is what Scripture faces us with.

I have often referred to *destination sickness* as the common illness of our day. Destination sickness is arriving at your destination, being where you have always wanted to be, having everything you always wanted to have, but not wanting anything that you've got. Thousands of people around this area today are suffering from this.

Now we are going to skip down to Verse 17, because in the intervening paragraph the apostle deals with Timothy personally in a

great passage which we will take next Sunday to close this study. Having said these personal words to Timothy, evidently Paul realizes that he has been rather negative about riches; perhaps he has left the impression that it is wrong to be rich. So he adds this postscript, in Verses 17-19, and answers the question that is on everyone's heart, "How should an affluent person act?" Paul answers in two realms -- a rich man's attitudes, and his actions.

First, his attitudes. Verse 17:

As for the rich in this world, charge them not to be haughty, nor to set their hopes on uncertain riches but on God who richly furnishes us with everything to enjoy. {1 Tim 6:17 RSV}

The first thing someone who has money ought to remember is, do not let it swell your head; do not let it make you feel you are better than someone else. Do not credit your cleverness, your education and your ability to spot a good investment as the reason you have these riches, because there are a lot of people just as clever, just as well educated who do not have riches. Never forget that being rich does not change you; you are no better than anyone else.

When I was a boy, the symbol of snobbishness for a rich person was a lorgnette -- a pair of glasses on a stick (a dirty look on a stick!) through which a socialite would look down her nose at people. That was the sign of haughtiness. Today it is a patronizing smile.

The Lord Jesus spoke about "the deceitfulness of riches," {cf, Matt 13:22, Mark 4:19}. Riches can deceive. They make you feel you are worth more, that you are better than, you really are, because people start treating you that way and you believe it. That is where we get the so-called upper classes, the aristocracy, the blue-bloods. Their blood is no bluer than anybody else's; they are no better than anyone else -- probably even not as nice in many ways -- but they think they are because they believe the lie that having riches makes them superior people.

I read the other day about an old Mexican laborer in Albuquerque, whose name was Candilario. He found a \$700 gold nugget up in the mountains and when he brought it into town he noticed that everybody began to treat him differently. He suddenly became Don Candilario. Then, as he spent his money around town, he became Don Juan Candilario; and then, Don Juan de Candilario, Caballero (which means gentleman). But finally, when the money was all gone, he said everybody reverted back to Old Candilario when they referred to him. That is the deceitfulness of riches. They give a sense of superior worth that is not really true.

Then the second thing Paul says is, do not count on your riches. Riches can disappear overnight. Many wealthy people in Vietnam had to flee just like the poor, and leave everything behind. Many rich Iranians thought the Shah was going to preserve their way of life in Iran, then the revolution came and it all disappeared. Many wealthy Americans in the State of Washington had beautiful cabins and property around the foot of Mt. St. Helen's, which are now buried under twenty feet of ashes. If the San Andreas fault lets loose, we will see how many of us retain the good things we have been given. Riches are uncertain; they can all disappear overnight. Jesus said, "Don't put your treasure where moth and rust corrupts and thieves break through and steal," {cf, Matt 6:19-20}. It is foolish to count on riches for security, for protection from the dangers and difficulties of life.

The third thing Paul says is to remember that it is "God who richly furnishes us with everything to enjoy." God is the giver. Many people forget that. They believe the lie their own heart tells them, that they are responsible for their own wealth; they earned it; they performed better than other people. But it is God who allows that wealth to come. God is the ultimate giver; and he gives, as this verse says, that we might enjoy riches.

Both the Old and the New Testaments clearly indicate it is not wrong to be wealthy. A group of Christians today are basically working at trying to convince us that it is wrong to have wealth at all, that the Bible is against it, and that we ought to give it all away. But the Bible says that God makes some people wealthy so that they might enjoy it. Watch wealthy people and see if they are enjoying their riches. If they are spending their wealth on themselves, heaping on more and more luxury, they are not enjoying their riches; their riches have become dull, commonplace, and boring -- nothing but anxiety and worry are created by them.

How do you enjoy riches? By making somebody happy with them; that is how. The only enjoyment riches can give is to use them in such a way that others are helped and blessed. That is what creates a sense of joy and gladness in the heart -- to know that you have been used of God to make somebody else happy, comfortable, relieved of distress, freed from bondage, given the food and shelter they need. Riches are given so that some may have the unique privilege of doing that.

Notice how the last verse confirms that and tells what actions to take if we are affluent, or if we have any money at all. Verse 18:

They are to do good, to be rich in good deeds, liberal and generous, thus laying up for themselves a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of the life which is life indeed. {1 Tim 6:18-19 RSV}

There are three things:

First, do good; that is, use your money in a way that helps people. There is a rather impersonal note there. It does not necessarily mean to be personally involved at this point. It means use your money wisely to help people. And do it. Do not just talk about it, do it. Give funds to relief of famine, to help the needy, to set up training schools, to encourage the spread of the gospel, to support missionaries, to minister to the weak and the retarded, the old, etc.

Second, "be rich in good deeds." That has a personal element to it. It implies that wealthy people are to be personally involved in things that are good and helpful. They are not merely to give their money to good causes, but to personally do something. I was encouraged by reading in the last issue of *Christianity Today* an article about wealthy Christians in Dallas. (Since earlier I spoke of Dallas rather perjoratively, I would like to bring out the other side of it.) This group is now organizing to get personally involved in helping poor people find ways of utilizing their gifts and abilities so as to help themselves. Helping people to help themselves is the best possible use of wealth.

Then, finally, be "liberal and generous." There is no worse testimony than a rich Christian who is a stingy, flint-hearted Scrooge, grasping at every penny, squeezing every nickel until the buffalo yells! A Christian is to be liberal and generous. Our Lord put it best when he said, "Freely you have received, freely give," {cf, Matt 10:8b KJV}.

Paul closes with two great results that will follow:

First (Verse 19a),

... thus laying up for themselves a good foundation for the future, {1 Tim 6:19a RSV}

What will survive this life and carry over into the next? Not things (we have seen that), but there is something that will: It is people. When you change people's lives you are laying up treasures in heaven, and they will be there to meet you when you get there. That is the force of one of the parables of Jesus. He said to use your money to win friends so that when the money fails they will be there to greet you when you get to glory. That is "laying up treasures in heaven," {cf, Matt 6:20}.

Then the second result is (Verse 19b),

... so that they may take hold of the life which is life indeed. {1 Tim 6:19b RSV}

That is, in the present -- using wealth in such a way that you are filled with adventure, excitement and joy right now. That is "life indeed," abundant life, a full and satisfying life. There is nothing that can contribute more to that than using money to help people now. That is what Paul is talking about. Obviously, it is only to Christians that a word like this is addressed, because they alone can lay hold of that "life which is life indeed." To use your money properly, as God gave it, to enjoy it to the fullest degree and thus use it to bless others' lives is to experience the excitement and adventure of the life that Jesus Christ has come to give us.

These are very practical passages. Everyone has to work them out in terms of his or her own situation; we cannot sit in judgment on each other in these areas. We must all live with the realization that some day we must leave everything behind and only that which we have given away will we have in eternity.

Prayer

Thank you, Lord, for the practicality of these words. May they help us correct our viewpoints, and resist the badgering, bloated misconceptions of the world around us. Make us willing to be joyful and useful servants. Thank you for the gift of wealth that you have given some among us. We pray that all of us may use it wisely, and not live to make money, but live to be righteous men and women. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

Title: The Cost of Riches
By: Ray C. Stedman
Series: Studies in First Timothy
Scripture: 1 Tim 6:6-10, 6:17-19
Message No: 17
Catalog No: 3780
Date: November 22, 1981

O MAN OF GOD!

by Ray C. Stedman

We have come to the last of our studies in First Timothy. This is a very moving passage in which the Apostle Paul addresses young Timothy, left all alone in this great city of Ephesus, a challenging, demanding and dangerous responsibility, to be the apostolic representative to the churches of the city. If you have ever felt left alone with a great responsibility and hardly anybody to lean on, you know exactly how Timothy felt. Paul wrote these letters to encourage him; and the Spirit of God has preserved them because they are an encouragement to us who have to face difficulty and demand in our world today.

But as for you, man of God, shun all this; aim at righteousness, godliness, faith, love, steadfastness, gentleness. Fight the good fight of the faith; take hold of the eternal life to which you were called when you made the good confession in the presence of many witnesses. {1 Tim 6:11-12 RSV}

Paul addresses Timothy with an unusual title, calling him, "O man of God," {1 Tim 6:11b KJV}. That is a remarkable word. In the Old Testament this title was reserved for the prophets, but, in the New Testament, only Timothy is addressed this way. It must have meant a great deal to him to have the Apostle Paul call him "a man of God." That title combines two remarkable concepts:

Man, in his weakness, confusion, blindness and failure, and God, in his majesty, his greatness and power. To be "a man of God" is the greatest title that could be bestowed upon Timothy. Every one who has the Spirit of God indwelling him has the desire to claim that title for himself -- to be a man or a woman of God, not a man of the world, not a man of the flesh, but a man of God.

My wife and I drove down from Oregon yesterday. She was driving as we traveled through that beautiful area around Mt. Shasta, while I was working on the last phases of this message. We swung around a mountain curve, and there was Mt. Shasta in all its beauty, with a new coating of fresh fallen snow glistening in the sun. At the foot of the mountain there is a relatively small cinder cone, named Black Butte, which has a remarkable resemblance in form to Mt. Shasta. (It looks as though somebody made a model of the mountain first and then built the mountain.) I was thinking of this phrase, "O man of God," and it suddenly struck me that those two mountains were symbolic of it: Black Butte, symbolizing man in his smallness and weakness, and the majesty, beauty and glory of the great white mountain, symbolizing the majesty of our God. The glory of Christianity is that those two, man and God (God in man) are combined together. This is the title that is bestowed on Timothy.

What does a man of God do in a world like ours? There are three imperative verbs here that mark what Paul said Timothy ought to do:

- First, "shun all this";
- Second, "aim at righteousness, godliness, faith, love, steadfastness, gentleness"; and
- Third, "fight the good fight of the faith."

Those are three verb forms which translated literally are words that all start with the letter "f." This will help us remember them. The first word is, *flee* ; the Christian is to flee certain things. The second word is, *follow* ; follow after, set yourself every day to pursue these qualities. Then the third word is, *fight* . I want to look briefly at these imperatives because they are helpful to us in this day.

First, "flee these things." Elsewhere in Scripture we are told to flee certain things. For instance, we are to "flee immorality" always. Peter says, "Flee youthful lusts which war against the soul." {cf, 1 Pet 2:11 KJV}. There are times in our Christian life when the only defense we have is a clean pair of heels. Get up and go; flee these things.

Paul is here referring to what he has just covered in the previous paragraph in his word about false teachers. Timothy is to flee the three characteristics of false teaching:

- The first characteristic is conceit -- taking pride in knowledge and relying upon that as a basis for success. If we are going to be men and women of God we are to flee conceit in any form.
- The second characteristic is "combativeness," the love of controversy. Some people love to get an argument going among the people of a church. This is a mark of a false teacher: he always wants to form a faction around an idea he has that is different than everybody else's. That is to be fled from.
- The third thing is avarice, greed, the love of money, the hunger for material gain, the desire to drive a Cadillac, a Rolls Royce or a Porsche, and to eat high off the hog (as they used to say in Arkansas or Montana). Paul tells Timothy to flee these things; they will only create difficulty in life.

Paul's second imperative, "follow after," is most important. He lists six things which divide into two groups -- the first three relating to God, the second three relating to man.

- The first thing on the list, *righteousness*, is very important. Paul says, "Follow after righteousness, godliness, and faith." Some of the commentators take this to be righteous behavior, saying that you are to try to live a righteous life. That is not wholly wrong because men or women of God are to be righteous in their behavior. But that is not what Paul is talking about here. Paul is referring to righteousness, not as behavior, but as belief. It is the word of the gospel, that when you came to know Jesus Christ he gave you his righteousness; and, as you understand that this is the way God sees you, you are no longer guilty, no longer tied to evil, no longer filled with weakness, but made righteous by God.

This is what gives a sense of security and stability in life. If you are always focusing on your behavior, trying to get a sense of worth because you act right, you will end up becoming a legalist, feeling that your behavior is what makes you acceptable before God -- and that is sheer death. But if you understand that God has already made you acceptable in Jesus Christ when you believed in him, and, therefore, that God loves you with the same love he had for Jesus himself, because in his sight you are as righteous as Jesus is, this gives you a sense of security and loving acceptance. That is the basis of stability and of proper functioning in life, and that is why Paul puts it first here: "Remember, Timothy, to follow after that consciousness that you are already righteous in Jesus Christ."

- The second word is *godliness*. This is the word we have seen so many times already in this letter. It means balanced wholeness -- spirit, soul and body being kept in good health. These days we see great emphasis on keeping our bodies healthy. An amazing amount of stuff is offered -- pulleys, straps, weights, jogging shoes, etc. -- to that end. Now there is nothing wrong in keeping the body healthy, but it is wrong to spend all your money doing that. What is also needed is a renewed mind that views life the way God sees it because that is the way life really is; emotions that are brought under control so that they do not keep you off balance all the time, so subject to moods that no one knows whether you are going to be in a good or a bad mood: and, above all, a spirit that is in touch with the living God, that is not merely living for the visible things of life, but sees a relationship with God himself as the most important factor in life. That is godliness, balanced wholeness.
- The third word is *fidelity*, or faithfulness, i.e., a loyalty to God, an awareness that you have already committed your life to him. When you became a Christian you decided to follow God, to obey his word and to walk in his way. That is your basic commitment for the rest of your life; you never intend to change. When a young man or a young woman or an older man or woman, has that kind of a relationship, he or she becomes a steady, dependable, exciting person. There is nothing more exciting than the living God.

That issues then in three words which have to do with the way Timothy treats people:

- The first word is *love*. How many times in Scripture do we have the exhortation that the mark of a true Christian is that he is a loving person! "Owe no man anything," Paul says in Romans, "but to love one another," {Rom 13:8a KJV}. Here in this very letter to Timothy, Paul opens with the words, "the end of our endeavor is love out of a pure heart and faith unfeigned," {cf, 1 Tim 1:5}. I do not think there is anything that shocks me more than to suddenly ask myself in the midst of a conversation, "Am I acting in love? Is my tone of voice loving, or is it sharp, caustic, filled with anger and hostility?" Many times I have to realize that the love that God has given me is not coming through at all.

Yet, this is the mark. Above all else in our relationship with people, the sign that we have really been touched by the Spirit of God is that we are becoming loving people. Is our home becoming a loving home, where we relate to each other with attitudes of concern for the others' welfare? That is also the mark of a growing church. I do not care how big the numbers are. That does not tell a thing. Some of the cults can fill the largest halls but numbers do not mean the church is growing. It is when the people are growing in love that you have a church that is alive.

- The second word is *steadfastness*. That means endurance, hanging in there, refusing to give up. That is one of the most contagious things in life. When things get tough and somebody says, "I've had it. I'm not going to try anymore, it is amazing how quickly people pick up that note and say, "Me too. It's not worth it." Soon people all around you start quitting. On the other hand, it just one person will say, "Sure it's tough, but let's keep going. God is with us. If we hang in there we're promised victory, somebody else will pick that up and it will spread like a beautiful contagion through an entire congregation. Unwillingness to quit is the mark of a Christian man or woman of God in the midst of a world that has gone wrong.

Paul says, "Pursue these," i.e., make a mental list of these qualities. There are only six of them. Ask yourself every day, "Is this happening in my life?" There is no more practical guideline in the Scriptures than Paul's word in Second Corinthians, "Examine yourselves whether you be in the faith or not," {cf, 2 Cor 13:5}. Something every Christian ought to do every day is take a quick mental checkup and ask himself, "How am I behaving? What's happening in my life? Where is it all coming from?" This is especially true if you want to affect the day in which you live.

- The third word for the man or woman of God is *fight*: "Fight the good fight of faith. Lay hold on eternal life to which

you have been called when you made the good confession before many witnesses," Paul says. That recognizes the true nature of the Christian life: it is a battleground, and you will never be given much of a breather. Many people have trouble there. They are always hoping that the battle will end, that the enemy will give up and go home, and they can begin to enjoy life without any troubles. That would be nice. That is what the Republicans and the Democrats are always offering. But it never happens, because this life is a battleground and we must never forget that. Do not expect much of a breather. God gives you times of peace, times of enjoyment and you should thank him for them. But remember, we are exposed all our life to a malevolent and ruthless enemy who knows exactly

- How to get at us,
- How to discourage us,
- How to make us angry with each other,
- How to plant seeds of hostility and unrest

between a husband and wife, in a family or in a community, and he is always doing that. The battle is fought right there.

Paul tells us how to fight the good fight of faith. "Take hold of that eternal life with which you began this Christian experience," he says. This is a parallel passage to that famous word in Ephesians 6, where Paul says, "Put on the whole armor of God that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil, and stand in the evil day," {cf, Eph 6:11 KJV}. To "put on the whole armor of God" and to "take hold of that eternal life" are one and the same thing. That armor is Jesus Christ -- his strength, his wisdom, his love, his gentleness, his peace appropriated in your life; he is in charge of what is happening to you, and you rest on that fact. That is the way you fight the good fight of faith; that is the way you take hold on life eternal. This is what happened to Timothy.

Paul reminds him, "Timothy, you started doing that when you confessed Christ. Keep it up This is what God has called you to."

Remember that word in First Corinthians 1:9, the key verse of that great letter. Paul says, "God is faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord," {1 Cor 1:9 RSV}. That is what we are called to.

It is what Brother Lawrence called, "practicing the presence of Christ."

Do you do that?

When you are washing dishes at the sink, do you practice the presence of Christ?

When you are at work in your office, or talking on the telephone, or dealing with your children, or shopping in the market, wherever, do you practice the presence of Christ? -- reminding yourself that

- He is with you,
- Empowering you and
- Teaching you how to react,
- Bringing to your remembrance things that you need to know about relationships

and then obeying him!

This is the way you fight the good fight of faith and lay hold of that eternal life to which you have been called. That is the secret of the Christian life.

So the man of God does three things in life:

- He flees certain things;
- He follows after the qualities listed; and
- He fights the good fight of faith by taking hold of the provision of Jesus Christ our Lord.

Paul now turns to the other side: The God before whom we stand. In these verses the apostle flings back the boundaries of life and, for our encouragement, opens to our amazed eyes the vision of the mighty God before whom we stand.

Listen to these words:

In the presence of God who gives life to all things, and of Christ Jesus who in his testimony before Pontius Pilate made the good confession, I charge you to keep the commandment unstained and free from reproach until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ; and this will be made manifest at the proper time by the blessed and only Sovereign, the King of kings and Lord of lords, who alone has immortality and dwells in unapproachable light, whom no

man has ever seen or can see. To him be honor and eternal dominion. Amen. {1 Tim 6:13-16 RSV}

Nothing will help more to nerve you for the fight than the vision of God. This is what Paul sets before Timothy. Notice the encouraging things here:

First, God is the Giver of life.

Do you sometimes feel beaten and dejected, buffeted by more things than you can handle, at the end of your strength? What you need is renewed vigor, renewed vitality and strength, and that is what you get when you turn to your God and see him as there with you to infuse strength and vitality back into you again. This is the part that prayer plays in our lives. We all have experienced the infusion of new strength and courage from God when we have turned to him in prayer in a moment of pressure. God is given to us that we might not lose heart when the times of discouragement come. Turn to him as the Author of life.

Then, as Paul points out, there is the encouragement of the example of Jesus.

Do you find it hard to admit your Christian faith at times in certain pressure groups? Then, think of Jesus, "who in his testimony before Pontius Pilate made the good confession." Pilate examined Jesus and found no fault in him. Then Pilate asked him a question and Jesus' answer would determine whether he would live or die. Pilate was anxious to set him free if he could because he recognized Jesus to be a righteous, innocent man whom the chief priests had delivered up for jealousy. "Are you the King of the Jews?" {Matt 27:11 RSV}, Pilate asked him. Jesus could have said "No," but thereby he would have denied his Messiahship; he was the King of the Jews. He knew that if he said "Yes," there was no way he could escape being put to death because the Jews would then charge Pilate with befriending a traitor to Caesar if he did not put him to death. That is what sealed Jesus' fate. He knew it, but he answered with the strongest affirmation that the Hebrew idiom has, "Thou sayest," or, "You are saying it," {Matt 27:11b KJV}. That cost him his life.

Paul is reminding Timothy, "There will be times when you will have to say "No," when you want to say "Yes," and everybody around you wants you to say "Yes." There will be times when it will be embarrassing to admit you are a Christian, but remember Jesus. He set the good example; he was the "faithful witness" {Rev 1:5} to the truth.

Furthermore, Paul goes on to remind Timothy that, though Jesus was put to death in weakness, he is coming again as the Lord of life, the focus of all history. Paul goes on to say, "I charge you to keep the commandment unstained and free from reproach until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ." The One who was here in weakness is coming again in great strength and will fill the horizon of life.

What is this commandment Timothy is to keep? There is only one answer to that: This is a reference back to Jesus' words in the Upper Room, when he gave us the Lord's supper. He said then, "A new commandment I give unto you, that you love one another as I have loved you," {John 13:34a KJV}. That is the commandment: "Love one another." Learn to be loving people; learn to forgive, to reach out and to think of others instead of yourself. Love is the central thing. Paul tells us in Romans 13 that "love is the fulfilling of the law," {Rom 13:10}. When you act in love you are keeping the Ten Commandments. Paul reminds Timothy now, "Keep that commandment unstained, without reproach," i.e., by the way you live. Do not go too far in your love; do not let it bring you into lust.

Some may say, "It's already too late for me." Well, remember that the blood of Jesus Christ, God's Son, cleanses from all unrighteousness. It is not too late for those who have fallen in this regard because of the provision God has made for cleansing. But we are to take advantage of that provision by allowing ourselves to be cleansed by the confession of our sin. "The blood of Jesus Christ then cleanses us" {1 Jn 1:7b}, and thus we "keep the commandment without stain and reproach until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ."

Jesus is coming again. There is nothing more certain than that. Somebody said to me the other day, "I'm going to do such and such, as sure as the sun is going to come up tomorrow morning." The sun may not come up tomorrow morning, however; we cannot be sure of that. But one thing we can be sure of is that Jesus Christ is returning to this earth. Scripture says so. We do not know when (Paul goes on to speak to that) because the times are in God's hands. But Paul is certain that Jesus will appear and when he does, all that we have struggled for in obscurity and weakness shall be brought out into light. This is an encouragement to our hearts.

Paul closes with a final word about the greatness and majesty of God. There is no more moving passage in all of Scripture than this, where God is set forth in his sovereign might. Verse 15:

... and this will be made manifest at the proper time by the blessed and only Sovereign, the King of kings and Lord of lords, {1 Tim 6:15 RSV}

When is Jesus coming?

Many are asking that question these days. Are we in the "last days"? Is the "man of sin" about to appear on the earth? Are we facing the great tribulation? Is the antichrist at hand? Are we in the last season?

These questions have been asked in every age. Notice what Paul says, "It is in God's hands. The Father has appointed the times and the seasons." The literal phrase is, "It is in its own time." Paul does not tell us whether it is going to be soon or later, but it will be when God is ready. And God is getting ready. I do not know how long it is going to take, but it will come, it is in its own time, because history is moving according to the plan and the program of God.

Remember that God is King over all the kings of earth. We are concerned about the great military might of Russia, which is building up at an unconscionable pace right now, and what is going to happen when it has its arsenal built to such a point that it has clear superiority over all the other nations, including the United States. The only answer that can satisfy a believer is that God is "King of kings and Lord of lords." All the great lords of earthly power are subject to his control.

Proverbs says, "The heart of the king is in the Lord's hand and he turns it whithersoever he will," {cf, Prov 21:1 KJV}. These men are not in ultimate control. Knowing this we can find peace and a sense of security in our troubled day.

God is unique in his majesty: "[he] alone has immortality," Paul says. That means deathlessness. He alone is able to conquer this great enemy, death. Immortality belongs to the gospel, and only those who believe the gospel can survive the emptiness and the corruption of death. Scripture everywhere tells us that.

Further, Paul says, God "dwells in unapproachable light." What majesty that pictures! The sun is the greatest manifestation of light we know today. On earth the nearest thing we have to it is the fireball caused by the explosion of a hydrogen bomb, the light of which is dazzling, blinding in its effect. Here is a symbol of the majesty of God. There is no one remotely like him. He is not a tired old grandfather up in glory, twiddling his thumbs, saying, "Tut, tut. What terrible things are happening down there!" No, God dwells in unimaginable light, in power, and majesty beyond our capacity to describe. No one can draw near to this light apart from the provision he has made through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Finally, God is invisible, the invisible Spirit, "whom no man has ever seen or can see." The most incredible mystery of Christianity was the night when, in a dirty stable in a cave in Bethlehem, a baby was born of whom the angels sang, "This day in the City of David is born unto you a Savior which is Christ the Lord, Emmanuel, God with us," {cf, Luke 2:11}. That is the wonderful message of Christmas. The great news of the gospel is that the invisible God has become visible in a Man. We cannot see God, but we can see Christ. This at last is where God is put on our level so that we can know the unknowable God. No wonder Paul ends with the word of worship:

To him be honor and eternal dominion. Amen. {1 Tim 6:16b RSV}

Do you not think Timothy was greatly strengthened by that word?

It is a word to strengthen all our hearts. God has not left us alone; we are not orphans in this 20th century day; he has not left us here to struggle on and work out our little plan all by our own resources. God stands waiting behind the scenes, making himself available. That is the marvel of the encouragement that is provided in Jesus Christ.

After a postscript about the treatment of wealth, Paul ends the letter in Verses 20-21:

O Timothy, guard what has been entrusted to you. Avoid the godless chatter and contradictions of what is falsely called knowledge, for by professing it some have missed the mark as regards the faith. {1 Tim 6:20-21 RSV}

"Guard what has been deposited with you." What is that? It is the truth as it is set forth in the Scriptures. Timothy is to guard that, i.e., use it rightly. This is why Paul uses the name "Timothy" here. "Timothy" means "he who honors God." Paul is saying, "O Timothy, [O he who honors God] guard what has been entrusted to you."

Every one of us who is a Christian can say that of himself. God has given us truth, truth never found in any hall of learning or great university in our country or in the world, and yet that truth is the view of reality that is absolutely certain. What a precious thing it is to be able to know the difference between right and wrong, error and truth, and to follow the truth! We "guard" it by using it, by living accordingly, and by not allowing anybody to take it away from us, or to water it down with false representation.

That is why Paul says to avoid the counterfeit, because there is in every age something called knowledge which is not knowledge at all. In that 1st century, such knowledge was what was called *Gnosticism*, a false philosophy that encouraged people to

worship angels and to get special revelations for themselves. In our day it is secular humanism which is exalted on every side and claimed to be the way of truth, the way of reality. But it too fulfills the characteristics Paul speaks of here -- "godless chatter," profane babblings, talking endlessly about man, his abilities and his wisdom, but never recognizing God.

Have you noticed that in all the "think" magazines, in all the intellectual journals today, there is scarcely any recognition of God, ever? Such knowledge is all centered on mankind, and it consists of contradictions of the truth. These journals say that there are no absolutes in life, that we are animals subject to behavioristic control, that we do what our glands tell us to do and we cannot help that, so there are no moral judgments. These are "contradictions of what is falsely called knowledge." Avoid this. Do not swallow that line of nonsense, the foolish and profane babbling that sounds impressive but is not impressive at all. It is dangerous stuff, because, as Paul says, "By professing it some have missed the mark as regards the faith."

I can call to mind right now a score or more of young people who have "missed the mark as regards the faith" because they have been attracted by this false, secular humanism that looks so impressive, and so thoughtful, so bolstered by evidence derived from human experience; they have swallowed that line and missed the glory, the majesty, and the greatness of God.

God has called us also to live in an age such as Timothy lived in. May we hear these words and heed them.

It is fitting that we close this service with a remembrance of the table of the Lord. This supper is a symbolic representation of a totally different way of life than that which we see in the world around us. The world is constantly saying, "Stand up for your rights; assert yourself; indulge yourself; get the most out of everything; live for yourself," But this supper is saying, "Sacrifice yourself; give up your rights." Jesus said, "Except a grain of wheat fall into the ground and die it abides alone, but if it dies it brings forth life," {cf, John 12:24}. This is the way to find life. Follow the cross, the death, the blood that is shed, and then feed upon the strength of Another provided to you. That is what the blood and the bread stand for.

As we partake of this Lord's Supper, let us meditate upon that and make this a moment of recommitment of our lives to the service of a Living God.

There is no greater honor in all the world than, in a day of rejection of the truth, to stand up and be counted for the God who is himself Truth and Reality.

Title: O Man of God!
By: Ray C. Stedman
Series: Studies in First Timothy
Scripture: 1 Tim 6:11-16, 6:20-21
Message No: 18
Catalog No: 3781
Date: November 29, 1981

THE PROMISE OF LIFE

by Ray C. Stedman

We come to this second letter to Timothy with quickened anticipation, realizing that these are the last recorded words of the Apostle Paul. Tradition tells us that shortly after this letter was written, Paul was taken out on the Ostian Way, outside the city of Rome, and there on an April morning he was beheaded.

This letter to Timothy is called a prison epistle because it was written at a time when the apostle was imprisoned for the cause of the gospel. But there is a vast difference of atmosphere between this and the first letter. That letter was written after the time Luke describes in the last paragraph of the book of Acts, when he tells us that Paul dwelt in his own hired house in Rome. Though chained to a Roman guard, Paul nevertheless had a good deal of freedom to move around in the house. He could have friends in to see him; he held meetings; he had companions who lived with him; and he had a great, hopeful sense that he would be released. But in the second letter to Timothy everything is different. The atmosphere seems to be much more gloomy and dark.

This second letter was probably written about four or five years after the first one. As best the scholars can piece together the circumstances, Paul seems to have been released from the first imprisonment, and then resumed his travels about the Roman Empire, taking Titus and Timothy with him. He went to the island of Crete, where he left Titus to set things in order in the new church that was growing there. He came on to Ephesus again, and there he left Timothy to set in order certain things in the church there. He himself went on up into Macedonia, and from there he wrote his first letter to Timothy.

Then, somewhere along the line, Paul probably took voyage to Spain. There is some evidence that he fulfilled his long standing

desire to reach the western part of the Roman Empire and to minister in Spain. Some even feel there is evidence that he got up as far as Britain, though that is uncertain. But it seems clear that he returned to the eastern parts of the Mediterranean and was rearrested, probably in the city of Troas, north of Ephesus, this time under the terrible atmosphere of the Neroian persecution.

The Emperor Nero had tried to blame the Christians for the great fire that destroyed the city of Rome, and opposition had broken out against Christians all through the Empire. For the first time they began to be subjected to bitter persecution. Christians were burned as living torches to light the Emperor's social gatherings. They were thrown to lions; they were killed by gladiators. They were widely despised throughout the Empire as being cannibals because they talked about eating the body and blood of Christ. They were thought to be atheists because they did not worship the idols that the pagans worshipped. They were said to be revolutionaries because they denied the ultimate authority of Caesar and said that Jesus was Lord. So opposition against Christians had sharpened across the Empire.

Following his second arrest, the apostle seems to have been imprisoned in a dungeon in the city of Rome. Tradition tells us this was the Mamertine Dungeon, located just across the street from the old senate building in the Roman Forum. You can still visit there today. There is a circular cell you enter by descending some steps; its only light is an open hole in the roof. There, beside the river, dank and dark and cold, was very likely where the Apostle Paul wrote this last letter to Timothy, his dear son in the faith.

The atmosphere of the letter reflects those circumstances. Paul is lonely: He will say in the paragraph we look at this morning, "I long night and day to see you." He is feeling abandoned: He writes, "All those in Asia have turned against me," {2 Tim 1:15}. "Only Luke is with me," {2 Tim 4:11a KJV}. "Demas has forsaken me and gone to Thessalonica," {cf, 2 Tim 4:10}. He is cold of body: He asks Timothy to bring the cloak which he left in Troas {cf, 2 Tim 4:13a}. He is bored in the long hours with little to do: He asks for the books and the parchments which he left behind in Troas {cf, 2 Tim 4:13b}. He is certain that the end of his life is at hand: He writes, "The time of my departure has come... I have finished the course, I have kept the faith," {cf, 2 Tim 4:6-7}. There is that word of clear anticipation that he had reached the end of his life.

Yet, despite the dark days, the letter opens with Paul's usual calm and confident expression of faith and grace. Verse 1:

**Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God according to the promise of the life which is in Christ Jesus,
To Timothy, my beloved child:
Grace, mercy, and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord. {2 Tim 1:1-2 RSV}**

It was always Paul's greatest boast and highest honor that he had been called to be an apostle of Jesus the Messiah, not of his own choosing, but, "by the will of God."

That is a rather remarkable claim. Here the apostle is lifting himself to a level with the twelve disciples, whom Jesus himself had chosen and ultimately sent out with the great commission to "go into all the nations of the world and preach the gospel to every creature," {cf, Mark 16:15}. To add oneself to that chosen group would be an act of arrogant presumption if it were not true, as Paul consistently claimed, that God had chosen him, that the Lord Jesus had appeared to him, not only on the Damascus Road when he was first converted, but many times since, and imparted to him the same truths that he taught the twelve when he was with them in the flesh. The fact that Paul knew that same body of truth is what convinced the twelve apostles that he was indeed a chosen vessel of the Lord. So Paul reminds Timothy of that in order to stabilize him, and to help him understand that he is an authentic spokesman for the Lord Jesus.

Paul uses here a rather remarkable description of the gospel, which does not appear anywhere else in the New Testament. He calls it "the promise of life in Christ Jesus." Paul gloried in the message that he proclaimed. In Romans he wrote, "I am not ashamed of the gospel because it is the power of God let loose among men, the power of God unto salvation," {cf, Rom 1:16}. The gospel changes people; it delivers them; it frees them; it heals them. The gospel brings people into the fullness of their manhood or womanhood; it sets them free to be what God intended them to be.

In Corinthians, Paul describes the gospel in these words: "We have this treasure in earthen vessels," {2 Cor 4:7}. We are weak men ourselves, he says, but what we have within us, this great gospel, is a treasure beyond compare. In Ephesians, Paul calls the gospel, "The unsearchable riches of Christ," {Eph 3:8}. In Colossians, he says it is, "Christ in you, the hope of glory," {Col 1:27b}; and in First Timothy he describes it as, "The glorious gospel of the blessed God," {1 Tim 1:11}. All those phrases are amplifications of what the apostle means when he writes here in Second Timothy, "the promise of life in Christ Jesus."

I have discovered that everybody everywhere, young and old alike, has a hunger for life. Nobody wants to be bored, nobody wants to live a dull, meaningless, empty, hollow life. We all want to live, to experience things, to feel alive and vital. This is what makes us vulnerable to the appeals of the world and the media, which constantly hold before us shortcuts to life, reminding us that we only go around once; we have to grab it while we can. "Live with gusto," we are told; "buy this deodorant or that toothpaste and you will live." It is amazing how much that idea takes hold of us.

Last week I watched on television an interview of Phil Donahue with a couple of punk rockers. They were a boy and a girl still in their early teens, and they had bleached their hair to a colorless blob; they both were wearing black lipstick, and they had powdered their faces so that they took on the pallor of death. Phil Donahue kept asking them, "Why do you dress in this bizarre style? Why do you seem to hunger after violence? Why do you get so carried away that you actually shed your own blood at times? What is behind this?" They responded, in all honesty, "What else is there?" Their answer was a silent protest against the emptiness of life, against the sense of being cheated by life, by the world and by society. Their answer is not justified. No one can blame any particular group of people or force for this kind of thing. It is a product of the world in which we live. As I watched that program, however, I could see the emptiness of young people who ought to be hungry for life, looking forward to it, but instead are disillusioned and despairing. What they have tasted already of life has left them feeling hopeless, empty and abandoned.

This gives point to Paul's word when he declares, at the end of his career, that in the gospel, and only in the good news about Jesus, is there found the promise of life. He is talking about life as God intended it to be lived, a quality of life which one can experience right now, not, as many often think Christianity teaches, "pie in the sky by and by." That is part of it, yes. Life does not end once we leave this earthly scene -- it expands infinitely in the hope of the gospel -- but it begins now. That is the point. This letter highlights for us a quality of life which one can experience right in the midst of circumstances that are falling apart.

So to this introverted, sensitive, sometimes fearful young man in Ephesus, Paul describes again the ingredients of the promise of life in Jesus Christ.

That is what is meant by the words, "Grace, mercy and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord." We read those words oftentimes as though they are merely words of greeting, but they are not. They are Paul's reminder in all his letters that grace, mercy, and peace are what make up the daily supply of life in Jesus Christ.

1. Grace is what God gives us that we do not deserve -- all the fullness of blessing that is ours without any effort whatsoever on our part. Grace consists of, for one thing, the forgiveness of our sins. What a marvelous thing that is! The older I grow the more I value this great gift of the gospel -- the forgiveness of sins, the lifting of the guilt of life. There is false guilt in our lives, I know. The enemy is quick to try to make us feel guilty about things we ought not feel guilty about. But there is also a very great load of true guilt for things we have done, for the loveless attitudes, the hurtful, hateful, shameful actions we have indulged in, the rebellious, defiant attitudes and actions that have hurt many. But the glorious word of the gospel is that, because of the death of Jesus as our substitute, God is rendered free to lift the load of that guilt and to not hold our transgressions against us.

That is a great blessing. It is one we ought to enjoy from day to day and week to week because it is not merely at the beginning of the Christian life that this is true, it is true all the way through. Every day we can start with a fresh, new sheet because of the forgiveness of our sins.

Then there is the consciousness of God's love and presence, not only to forgive us, but to welcome us. In the gospel we feel ourselves welcomed home like the prodigal son, with a Father's arms about us, a Father's loving concern for us, and a Father's welcome in his heart. That too is part of the gospel.

With it comes the sense of the power to obey God's word, an inner strengthening of our will that when we set it in the direction he tells us to go, we find we are able to do what we could not do before because of the grace and strength of Jesus who goes with us. This is what makes it possible for alcoholics to leave their drinking, for homosexuals to turn from their wrongful partners and begin to develop again the heterosexual impulses in their lives; this is what enables marriages that are breaking apart to hang together, because God has said he will give strength to walk in his ways when we agree to follow.

Then there is the insight and the understanding that God imparts to us. All this is part of the grace of God which is given constantly to us -- things we do not deserve, but which we nevertheless have by faith in Christ.

2. Then there is mercy. The difference between mercy and grace is that grace gives us what we do not deserve, while mercy withholds what we do deserve. It is God's mercy which tempers the trials of our lives and adjusts them to our weakness of faith and flesh. It is mercy that led the Lord Jesus to say to his disciples, "I have yet many things to say unto you, but you can't bear them yet," {cf, John 16:12}. He did not say these things until the disciples were strengthened by the coming of the Spirit to enable them to hear what he had to say.

The psalmist says, "It is of thy mercies that we are not consumed." I am amazed at how many people, even Christians, think that life ought to be without trial, that there ought to be sunshine all the way, that the normal, natural expectancy of life is that every day ought to be fun and delight with nothing going wrong.

But that is totally unrealistic. In a fallen world the exact opposite is true. Every day ought to be nothing but disaster and sheer chaos. Every day, every moment ought to be filled with malice, hatred, viciousness and betrayal. The fact that

those things only come rather infrequently into our lives is due to the mercies of God. "It is of his mercies that we are not consumed." We ought to expect nothing but the direst hardships, but actually we are given hours and days -- sometimes weeks and months -- of joy, blessing, peace, excitement and adventure. That is due to the mercies of God.

This is an especially meaningful word to use with Timothy. Paul does not use it in all his letters, but with Timothy he does because he wants to encourage this young man that God was tempering the trials that he would face.

3. "Grace, mercy and peace from God the Father." Peace is that inner sense of well-being when you realize that, no matter how dark it may look, there is a way through the trial that Jesus himself is with you and will go through it with you that he is totally in control of the event.

Steve Zeisler was right when, in his fine studies in Philippians, he said, "This is the great 'shalom' of God," the inner calm that keeps you panic proof.

Are you panic-proof? Have you learned that God is in charge, that the circumstances that come are of his permitting, that he is going to see you through and it will come out to blessing?

Those are the ingredients of the "promise of life in Christ Jesus."

- Grace, incredibly abundant grace, gives us what we do not deserve;
- Mercy withholds what we do deserve, it keeps us from getting all that we have coming; and
- Peace reassures us that it will all work out to our good and God's glory.

That is the "promise of life in Christ Jesus." That is wonderful good news, isn't it? I don't know why you don't rise up and say "Hallelujah!"

The Apostle Paul too needs a daily supply of grace, mercy, and peace. Here he is in his prison cell, missing Timothy with every moment, concerned about him that he will stand fast, and remain faithful and fruitful in Ephesus. Yet Paul is now aware that he must leave him, never to see him again in this violent, cold and cruel world, and so he writes (Verse 3):

I thank God whom I serve with a clear conscience, as did my fathers, when I remember you constantly in my prayers. As I remember your tears, I long night and day to see you, that I may be filled with joy. I am reminded of your sincere faith, a faith that dwelt first in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice and now, I am sure, dwells in you. Hence I remind you to rekindle the gift of God that is within you through the laying on of my hands; for God did not give us a spirit of timidity [of fear] but a spirit of power and love and self-control. {2 Tim 1:3-7 RSV}

The paragraph begins, "I thank God," but that is really a rather weak rendering of what the Greek says. It should be, "When I think about you, Timothy, I have joy in God." That is putting the emphasis where it ought to be. It is not Timothy who is the ground of Paul's confidence, but the God who is at work in Timothy.

This ought to help us a lot in learning how to pray for one another. You do not pray because things seem to be going well in somebody's life. No, he may be falling apart, but, if God is in that life, you can pray with confidence because God will do his work. Remember how Paul wrote to the Philippians and said to them, in that oft-quoted verse, "I am confident of this very thing that he who began a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ," {cf, Phil 1:6 KJV}. That is where the ground of confidence in prayer for another rests. "I have joy in God," Paul says, "whom I serve with a clear conscience as did my fathers."

Here Paul is saying that, in his prayers for Timothy, he prays confidently because of his own clear conscience. The word is a "cleansed" conscience. Nobody would ever have a clear conscience because that requires a perfect record of behavior; to have a clear conscience means you have never done anything wrong. But that is not the word the apostle employs. He says "a cleansed conscience," which acknowledges that there have been many things which were wrong, but God has dealt with them. God has cleansed; God has washed them away.

Paul knows that this is what is happening with Timothy. Timothy may make mistakes -- he will fail, he will do some things that are wrong -- but God can cleanse his conscience. Paul says that has been his experience too. In fact, even before he became a Christian he learned this from his "fathers," i.e., his Jewish ancestors. They had been taught that when there is something wrong, when there is some guilt in your life, you bring a sacrifice and that cleanses your conscience. All Paul needed to learn was that the sacrifice God meant was the sacrifice of Jesus, the life and death of Jesus, that would cleanse the conscience from dead works. Paul had been doing that, and he could pray, on that ground, with confidence about Timothy because he knew God would cleanse his conscience as well.

More than that, Paul prayed constantly for Timothy because of four things he could not forget about him:

First, there was "his tears of love." Verse 4:

**As I remember your tears, I long night and day to see you, that I may be filled with joy.
{2 Tim 1:4 RSV}**

I do not know when Timothy wept with Paul. Many suggest, and I think this has merit, that this probably occurred when Paul was suddenly rearrested, torn from Timothy's company, and dragged off to his final imprisonment in Rome. Where this happened we are not sure. Personally, I think it probably happened in the city of Troas. Paul did not even have time to go back and get his belongings. Suddenly, in the midst of the terrible outbreak of persecution against Christians, a band of Roman soldiers grabbed him, and, without any explanation, dragged him away as a prisoner. Looking back, Paul could see Timothy's anguished face, and noted the tears running down the cheeks of this young man as he watched his dearly beloved father in the faith dragged off to jail. Paul says, "I can't forget that. Every time I think of you, Timothy, I see the tears running down your face, and it makes me pray for you."

Forty-two years ago I taught a Sunday School class of high school boys in Chicago. I was 21 then, and those boys who were in their early teens were not much younger than I. Among them were two boys, named Archie and Lloyd, whom I was particularly close to. I had spent a lot of time with them. We had studied the Word together, and prayed together; we had done some fun things together. They were dear to me, and I to them. But there came the time when I had to leave Chicago and go back to live in Denver. That was one of those moments when you know you probably will not see your friends again. Archie and Lloyd came with me to the train station, and as we said goodbye on the platform I remember so well the tears running down their faces. For many, many years, whenever I thought of that event, I was moved to pray for those two boys because I remembered their tears of love when we said goodbye.

This is what the apostle is doing here.

Is there someone you are thinking about, someone whose love and tears you remember when you had to leave? Are you reminded, as Paul was reminded of Timothy, to pray for that someone? "I remember you constantly in my prayers when I think of your tears of love."

Not only was Paul reminded of Timothy's tears, but also he was reminded of his sincere faith. Verse 5:

I am reminded of your sincere faith, a faith that dwelt first in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice and now, I am sure, dwells in you. {2 Tim 1:5 RSV}

This was the sturdy, genuine faith which Timothy exhibited even when he was a young man, probably a boy of only 16 or 17 years of age, when he came to Christ under Paul's ministry in the city of Lystra, in Asia Minor.

It is hard to know exactly what the apostle means when he speaks of this "sincere faith" which dwelt first in Timothy's grandmother and then in his mother. Commentators differ as to whether Paul was referring to the Christian faith or to a devout Jewish faith.

My wife and I were in Israel recently and we traveled about with a devout Jewish couple whose faith was strongly fixed on the Messianic promises of the Old Testament that God would send to Israel a Messiah. They knew we believed that Jesus was that Messiah, but they had not yet come to that conviction. Their faith, however, was solid and sure that there was coming a Messiah who would fulfill the promises of the prophets.

So it may have been that Paul meant that this Jewish grandmother and mother were godly Jews.

On the other hand, some of the commentators feel that it may well have been that these women were actually Christians before Timothy. On the day of Pentecost, perhaps, when 3,000 Jews were converted on one day, it may well have been that grandmother Lois was there. She too may have heard the words of Peter on that day proclaiming that God had made Jesus of Nazareth both Lord and Christ. Being pricked to her heart, she may have cried out, "Sir, what should we do?" It may have been that Lois came to Christ there, and then, coming back into the city of Lystra, she had led her daughter to the Lord.

When Eunice later married a Greek and they had a baby whom they named Timothy, the mother and the grandmother must have brought him up in the hope and expectation and knowledge of the Scriptures. (Paul will refer to that later in this letter.) But it was not until Paul came to Lystra and began to preach with great power the truth about Jesus that Timothy's heart opened and he too received the gift of life in Jesus Christ. Remembering that sincere faith that dwelt in Timothy, Paul is encouraged to pray for him.

The third thing that reminded Paul of Timothy was the spiritual gift that Timothy evidently had. Verse 6:

Hence I remind you to rekindle the gift of God that is within you through the laying on of my hands. {2 Tim 1:6 RSV}

Most of the commentators refer this to the ordination (as they call it) of Timothy, when, a year or so after his conversion, Timothy joined the apostle and was sent out by the church to accompany Paul on his journey.

I have trouble with that, however, because I believe that the Scriptures teach that the gifts of the Spirit are imparted to us at our new birth in Christ. Just as the abilities, the natural talents we have, were given to us when we were first born into this earthly life, so the gifts of the Spirit are given to us when we are born again. If that is true, then this is not a reference to Timothy's ordination but to his conversion.

It may well have been that Timothy came to Christ at a public meeting, where, when he expressed his faith in Jesus, the elders of that meeting gathered and laid their hands on him, and, with the Apostle Paul, prayed for him. As we learned in the first letter to Timothy, some prophetic utterance was given that indicated that this was a young man who would be greatly used of God. Paul is reminding Timothy of the impartation of the gift of the Spirit.

I would say that this was the gift of an evangelist-teacher, one who is able to teach the Word with such attractiveness that non-Christians would come to Christ, for later in this very letter Paul says to Timothy, "Do the work of an evangelist." But whatever it was, it was a gift that needed to be kept alive, breathed upon and used, in order to function properly.

That is the way with all of our spiritual gifts. Every believer here has spiritual gifts. What a tragedy if you do not use them! That is why we need to hear this word that Paul addresses to Timothy: "Rekindle, stir up [like you would stir up the embers of a fire that is about to go out] the gift that is in you [which was given unto you by the Holy Spirit]."

That reminds Paul, every time he thinks of the spiritual gift that is lying latent in this young man, to pray for him.

Then the final thing is the fact that in Timothy there was clearly the indwelling Spirit of God himself. Notice the distinction Paul makes here. Speaking about the spiritual gift he says that "it was given to you, Timothy," but when he comes to the spirit that was in him he says, "God did not give us the spirit." Everybody does not have the same spiritual gift, but everyone has the gift of the Spirit, i.e., the Spirit himself indwelling us.

Here Paul says two wonderful things about him, a negative and a positive. The Spirit who is in us is not the spirit of fear. I do not know any statement in Paul's writings that is more practically important to us than that, because, if you are like me, you are oppressed and assaulted by a spirit of fear most of the time. Anxiety, worry, trembling about what is going to happen, a sense of terrible disaster looming, of chaos and crisis that is about to break upon us -- these are forms of fear; this is the spirit of fear. This verse says that these do not come from God.

Did it ever occur to you that Christians are forbidden to fear?

How many times in the Scriptures do we read that Jesus said, "Fear not!" "Let not your heart be troubled," {John 14:1, 14:27}. Do not let it go in that direction. Stop it when it starts going that way. God does not give us a spirit of fear. If we have such it is coming from another source, the enemy, who is the spirit of fear.

What is the spirit God has given us? First of all, it is power -- a spirit of power. There is one place in the history of each of us that a breakthrough occurs where the power of the enemy is broken. The power of the Lord is more triumphant, more victorious than the power of the enemy ever was. That is the place where we confront our situation by trust in the grace of God, the existential moment that we are facing at any precise time. The power of the enemy has been broken and God has given us a spirit of power so that we are able to refuse the wrong and obey the right when we set our wills to do so. This power is released to us when we choose to obey. It does not make us feel powerful -- we still feel weak -- but strength is imparted to us to walk on step by step and God will see us through.

Then the Spirit which God gives us is also the spirit of love, which means this is addressed to other people as well as to ourselves. We are expected not only to be concerned about our struggles and problems, but others' too, and we long to reach out to them to help them with their problems. Nothing is more proof to me that a person is filled with the Spirit than when he evidences concern for somebody else's problems. That is the spirit of love.

Finally, it is the spirit of sound judgment; that is the word Paul employs. It is not fanaticism; it is not talking constantly about dreams, visions, special revelations and wonderful experiences. It is talking about sober, realistic appraisals of a situation, deciding the right thing to do, and then, steadfastly, quietly, moving to do it. That is the spirit of sound judgment.

Last week a man came up to me at a service and handed me a piece of paper. When I read it later I found it was a rambling account of visions and special revelations he said he had had. Among them was a vision that he had had of Jesus, where Jesus suddenly appeared to him, just 3-1/2 feet from him -- exactly three and one-half feet! -- and he had seen him clearly. He saw the robe in which Jesus was dressed; he even saw, he said, that Jesus had had acne when he was a boy because the acne scars were still there. This had encouraged this man because he had had acne when he was a boy. How ridiculous! That kind of fanaticism is not the Spirit of God.

The Spirit of God is a spirit of power, love, and of sound judgment. When Paul thought about these things he was encouraged about Timothy. He could pray with confidence that God would bless him and use him.

When one sees a young man whose heart is awakened with love, who has a constant and quiet faith in the presence and the power of God, who has been given a gift of the Spirit that he has used to bless others' lives, and who is permanently indwelt by the Spirit of power and love and self-control, one can be confident that *that* man is going to stand, no matter what the circumstances. Even if there is temporary failure, God will bring him back. So, Paul says, "I glory, I joy in God who is able to do that with you, Timothy. God will hold you steady."

That is the introduction to the letter.

I hope it will encourage us as we go on in this to find the faith we need for the dark days that lie ahead.

May God help us.

Prayer

Thank you, Lord, for the sincere faith that lays hold of the reality of your presence and steadies us in times of crisis, times of pressure, times of peril and danger to us. Help us to look onward and upward unto you. We pray in Jesus' name, Amen.

Title: The Promise of Life
By: Ray C. Stedman
Series: Studies in Second Timothy
Scripture: 2 Tim 1:1-7
Message No: 1
Catalog No: 3782
Date: February 7, 1982

THE CALL TO COURAGE

by Ray C. Stedman

During the presentation on the work of the Christian Service Brigade this morning, it struck me that the beautiful thing about the work of these men with young boys is that they are passing the torch of faith on to another generation. It is always encouraging to see that happening. That is the way a new and upcoming generation learns values, principles and guidelines that will steady it and hold it in the midst of the swirling maelstroms of unbelief and immorality it has to face.

This is what we have here in this second letter of Paul to Timothy. The apostle knows that he is about to leave this life -- he says so in this very letter: "The time of my departure is at hand," {2 Tim 4:6b KJV}. He is writing his last words to Timothy from that lonely, cold and sometimes boring cell prison cell in Rome, writing to a young man he knows is timid, frightened, and oftentimes pressured to be ashamed of the gospel.

We all can identify with that problem today. Many of you work in places where the majority of people around you are not Christians. Some of them are anti-Christian, perhaps even violently so, so there are times when you feel ashamed that you are a Christian. You are afraid people will find out; or, if they already know that you are a Christian, you tend to keep it quiet and not say much about it. That is an universal experience if we have any contact at all with non-Christians; and that is the problem the apostle takes up now with Timothy, his son in the faith, ministering in the great, pagan city of Ephesus.

Paul says two basic things to Timothy to help him overcome that, but we are only going to take the first of these today. In

Verse 8 the apostle says, "Do not be ashamed of testifying to our Lord"; and then in Verse 14 he tells him, "Guard the truth that has been entrusted to you by the Holy Spirit who dwells within us."

This morning I want to look with you at the matter of how the apostle helped his struggling young son in the faith to overcome the tendency to be ashamed of the gospel. There are three things the apostle said that Timothy was apt to be ashamed of.

First, he says (Verse 8),

Do not be ashamed then of testifying to our Lord, nor of me his prisoner, but take your share of suffering for the gospel in the power of God, {2 Tim 1:8 RSV}

I think Timothy was tempted, at least, to be ashamed of the Lord because Jesus is invisible.

You have probably felt ashamed because of that too. To talk about a Lord who is the most important Being in your life and yet not be able to show him to people or allow them to hear him, to maintain that a Man who lived two thousand years ago is still alive today in a vital relationship with you, is to expose yourself to the ridicule and incredulity of many. Timothy felt that way too.

Furthermore, Timothy was tempted to be ashamed of Paul because Paul was a political prisoner, on the outs with the administration of the Roman Empire, and viewed as an enemy of the Emperor and destructive in society. Paul urges Timothy to overcome that.

And third, Timothy was ashamed of the gospel. I have felt that way, and I am sure you have too, because the gospel in its basic element is insulting to the pride of men. The world loves to imagine itself to be adequate to solve its problems. Individuals oftentimes manifest a remarkable sense of self-sufficiency and independence; they refuse to admit that they need any help. But the basic declaration of the gospel is that man is helpless and lost.

At the Congress on the Bible in San Diego last week, the opening message was brought by Luis Palau, whom I regard as a permanent member of this congregation. In his address, Luis told of two incidents:

- The first concerned his leading the president of one of the South American republics to the Lord; and
- The second of his leading a janitor to the Lord in the city of Atlanta just last week.

What Luis pointed out was that the president and the janitor had to come exactly the same way -- they both had to admit they were hopelessly lost, that they had no abilities in themselves to deliver themselves from what was destroying their lives. Both of them had to cast themselves on the saving mercy of the Lord Jesus Christ, and both of them manifested tremendous change afterwards.

That is what the gospel does: It undercuts the pride, the self-sufficiency and arrogance of man. As a result, we tend to be ashamed sometimes of speaking of the gospel to proud individuals.

So let us see how Paul helps this young, timid, introverted man overcome that tendency to shame. That is what can help us today. The passage is a rather complicated one, so to simplify it for you I am going to suggest that you take your pen and underline two phrases which the apostle uses here to help in understanding it. The first phrase comes at the end of Verse 8: Paul says, "Share in suffering for the gospel in the power of God." Underline the words, "power of God." The second phrase is in Verse 13. Underline these words, "follow the pattern of sound words." There are the two resources that will help us overcome any tendency to be ashamed of our faith.

First, realize that the gospel is "the power of God." You never have to be ashamed of power. Americans, particularly, worship and respect power. But when you really understand the power of the gospel you will lose every bit of shame; that is what Paul is saying. Furthermore, when you obey the Word of God, when there is in you a resolute determination to obey what the Scriptures tell you to do, then you discover that leads you into health and wholeness, and you lose your sense of shame of the gospel. Those are the two things we want to look at this morning.

Notice what the apostle now says about the power of God. It has been demonstrated for us, he says,

... in the power of God, who saved us and called us with a holy calling, {2 Tim 1:8b-9a RSV}

That is where we see the power of God at work. Every new birth, every regeneration, is an unquestionable miracle on the part of God. No one ever comes to God without God performing a transforming miracle; we must never forget that.

Last week I received a most interesting letter from a prisoner in the penitentiary at Tracy. I will merely summarize it for you because it is a rather lengthy letter. This man wrote,

"I found myself sitting in the Sacramento County jail, a three-time loser. I'm 66 years old, and I decided that, after having lost out three times, my life was no longer worth living. I had to go see my attorney, and as I passed by a trash bin, lying on top of the trash were some of your messages called Discovery Papers."

(A very logical place to look for them!) He said,

"Wanting something to read, I picked them up. Little did I know what was going to happen to me when I read them."

Then he added this line which I love:

"One man's trash is another man's treasure."

He went on to write that he read the first message, called, "How to be Saved" (taken from Romans 10). When he finished reading it, he wrote,

"I decided that though I never thought I needed to be saved from anything in my life, I now realized I did; and that if I wanted God to accept me I had better clean up my life and get it ready so he would be willing to take me."

He continued,

"I determined I was going to do that. Then I read the second message, 'Who Chose Whom' [from Romans 9], and when I finished that I knew that if I worked the rest of my life I could never make myself fit to be saved."

Continuing, he wrote,

"Lying on my bunk all alone, I woke in the middle of the night with the thoughts of that message on my mind. I seemed to sense a presence in the cell with me, and suddenly I found myself breaking into tears. Sitting on my bunk, I opened my heart to Jesus and asked him to come in, to deliver me and save me. And that's what he did. I didn't feel anything different except that I slept all night long for the first time in years."

He said,

"In the morning, everything seemed to be different. The cell looked different; the prisoners around me looked different; the food I had been complaining about tasted good. One of the other prisoners said to me, 'Pop, you look different. What's happened to you?'"

He wrote,

"A little voice inside of me said, 'Tell him,' so I did. There were twenty-five men in that cell and eleven of them asked Jesus Christ into their lives. I have been reading your first book on Romans and it says there is another book, so I want to get that one too. Will you send it to me? I will send you all the money I have got. It's only \$5.45, but what is money compared with the truth I am reading about."

So we have a new reader of Discovery Papers!

That example is a little dramatic, but it illustrates the fact that every regeneration, every salvation, is a miracle. It means that a transformed life, a new life, has been imparted. That is a demonstration of the quiet working of the power of God. Through the record of human history, there is nothing like that power that can take men who, oftentimes, are raging animals, wild and revolutionary, and transform them into sober, solid, delightful people. That power can take sharp, censorious people with acid tongues and soften them and make them over into new persons. It can take a proud, pompous, self-righteous, self-sufficient professor, or whatever, and transform him into a gentle, easy to live with, wonderful person. It can take a Chuck Colson, who openly swore he would run over his own grandmother to achieve his purposes, and turn him into a caring, concerned man who has dedicated his life to helping people in prison. That is a miracle. That is the power of God, and it ought to keep us from being ashamed of our Christian faith.

With that, the apostle links this term: "He called us with a holy calling." That is speaking of sanctification, the process of reformation as well as regeneration, where our lives start to be transformed. Not only is regeneration a miracle and a demonstration of the power of God, but the continuing growth and transformation of an individual is an evidence of the power of God. That power causes us to turn away from hurt and shame and ugliness unto health and wholeness. (That is what the word *holy* means, "wholeness.")

If you are really a Christian, you will find deep in your heart a relentless urge to break with your sin and your selfishness, oftentimes at great pain to yourself, to face the pain of withdrawal, and yet to walk with and grow with Christ. If you do not

sense that urge there, you might well question whether you are a Christian or not, because that is a sign of the residency of the Spirit in the life. We all resist him, we all struggle, and dig in our heels, and do not want to be changed because we love our sins and the pleasure they give us, but God has set his heart upon transforming us into the image of his Son, and ultimately we cannot deny that urge. Though we may waste years and years in resistance to the Spirit of God, once he has begun to work in a truly regenerate heart he promises that he will fulfill it, and bring us, at last, to yielding in those areas of hurt and shame.

That work does not originate with us. The apostle says very clearly that it is:

... not in virtue of our works [that he does this] but in virtue of his own purpose and grace which he gave us in Christ Jesus ages ago, {2 Tim 1:9 RSV}

That is an amazing declaration. It is saying that though we know we have to make decisions or those things do not happen -- we have to obey the Word, we have to follow our Lord -- nevertheless, we learn also that God has determined before the world began that he would bring into our lives the factors that would make us make those decisions.

Imagine that you arrive in a city where a great political convention is going on. You know that when you get there all the hotels are going to be sold out, but in a frail hope that you might find something you go into a big hotel and ask for a room. To your amazement, the clerk says, "We have a reservation for you already. We have been expecting you for months; it is all ready." That is something of the feeling you get when you read a passage like this. You know that you had to decide to give up the things that were hurting you in your life. You struggled with that, but you gave in, and when you did you read that God had determined that you would do that before the ages began.

Isn't that amazing?

But we are dealing with the power of God, not the weakness of men, an omnipotent God who knows how to work out his purposes through strange and wonderful ways.

Not only that, but that power has been demonstrated, says the apostle, in the historic work of Jesus. Paul puts it this way (Verse 10):

[He] now has manifested [that] through the appearing of our Savior Christ Jesus, who abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel. {2 Tim 1:10 RSV}

I hope you never allow any reference to the death and resurrection of Jesus to become mechanical and indifferent to you. This is the heart of the Christian faith: The work of our Savior, the blood of the cross, the glory of the resurrection. I try to remind my own heart never to let these things ever be expressed without some corresponding response in my own heart, because, according to this, the death and resurrection of Jesus accomplished two fantastic things for us:

The first is, Jesus nullified the power of death. It says here that he "abolished death." That does not mean that he eliminated it, because, just like others, Christians die. The word is the Greek word for "nullify, to bring to nothing." As Paul declares in First Corinthians 15, it is that treatment of death which causes Christians to be able to say, at the edge of the grave, "Oh, grave where is thy victory? Oh, death where is thy sting?" {cf, 1 Cor 15:55 RSV}. Jesus has taken the sting out of death.

On Golden Pond, the movie with Henry Fonda, Jane Fonda, and Katherine Hepburn that is currently showing in the theaters, is the story of an 80-year-old professor who is facing the relentless approach of death. It is a beautiful picture, although the language is a bit unpleasant at times. All through the movie you sense that there is a growing dread at the fact of approaching death. Haunting the background and tainting every delightful scene of all the beauty of nature that is displayed in the film is the increasing awareness of the cold, clammy hand of death that will bring an end to all the delight and beauty that these lives have known. In subtle ways, not overtly but covertly expressed, there is the expression from all the participants in the story of the dread of death. The film is in some ways a hopeless, tragic story. Everyone walks out of the theater sober and quieted. It is a beautiful but tragic story which captures, as no other film today has captured, the feeling in millions of hearts as they face the fact of death.

I could not help but contrast that story with the many Christians, some of whom I have recently sat with, who are facing the approaching end of their lives. In almost every case there is a light on their face, a sense of anticipation, of hope and of certainty in the hour of death; I have talked with many and seen them express a sense of peace, a quiet anticipation of glory to come. What a difference! That is what the resurrection of Jesus has accomplished: it has removed the fear of death.

I read once of a Christian man whose doctor told him he was dying. The man was so happy about this that it charged his body with so much adrenaline he lived for two more weeks! He thought he was going to be dead by evening and he was disappointed. That is what Jesus has done: He has nullified the power of death.

Further, the apostle says, Jesus "brought life and immortality to light through the gospel." The Old Testament does not give a lot of information on what lies beyond, but when Jesus came -- and ever since he was here we have had this -- he made clear the glory of anticipation of immortality, i.e., life in its fullest degree, permanently enjoyed into the future.

There are two things here:

The word *life* here is a reference to the change which occurs in the human heart when we become Christians, the new quality of life imparted to us, that quality which made our prisoner friend's fellow prisoners say to him, "What's happened to you? You're different." That is *life*. Jesus brought that into visibility, and that tremendous change is apparent in many, many Christians as they come into this new experience. But more than that, it is immortality -- that life goes on beyond this life in a glorious experience of the fullness of redemption.

My wife went to visit her 94-year-old mother this week. Gram is growing very frail and fragile. She spends her time, for the most part, just sitting and watching a little TV and talking to a few people around her. They began to talk about heaven, and her mother said to Elaine, "What will it be like then? Will we just sit around? I'm so tired of sitting around." Elaine was able to reassure her that, "No, we will leap and run and fly with new bodies, capable of responding to every demand of the spirit."

The glorious expectation of the fullness of the life to come, that is immortality. These bodies are subject to death and weariness. "The spirit is willing," we say, "but the flesh is ready for the weekend." In those new bodies, however, the spirit will make its demand and the flesh will be equal to it. We are given wonderful pictures in the Scriptures of what that is like.

It is the power of God that brings that kind of certainty and hope into a Christian life. It is the gospel, so we need not be ashamed of it, for the gospel is the answer to the deepest longings of men and women everywhere. These things that make us ashamed, the cynicism etc., that we run into, are only superficial reactions. When you get down underneath, when you explain and demonstrate in your own life what the gospel means, you awaken a hunger and a restlessness in the hearts of everybody observing you to want to find out what this marvelous thing is. We do not need to be ashamed, for "it is the power of God unto salvation," {cf, Rom 1:16}.

But not only is the gospel demonstrated in salvation, Paul goes on to say that he himself has modeled what Timothy's courageous response ought to be. Timothy is under great pressure, he is facing severe temptations to shut up, and be quiet, to disappear into the woodwork, and say nothing. But Paul has been there too, he says, and he has modeled a response (Verse 12):

For this gospel I was appointed a preacher and apostle and teacher, and therefore I suffer as I do. But I am not ashamed, for I know whom I have believed, and I am sure that he is able to guard until that Day what has been entrusted to me. {2 Tim 1:12-13 RSV}

Paul has already gone down the path. Looking back now to the young man coming behind him, he says, "Timothy, you don't need to be ashamed. I'm not ashamed, and I've been through everything you're going through. I know that the resources that were available to me are available to you, and they are sufficient for the task."

Paul had been called, as Timothy had been called. "I was appointed," he says, "a preacher, an apostle and a teacher." A proclaimer of the good news -- that is a preacher; a pioneer to lay new foundations -- that is an apostle; an explainer of the intricacies and meanings of the truth he proclaims -- that is a teacher. Timothy is sent to be a preacher and a teacher. So was Paul, therefore he understands what Timothy is up against.

But, Paul says (and notice the connection) because of that he suffered. It is important to see what Paul is saying. It was the very fact that he was challenging the mores, the ethics, and the philosophy of the world that was the cause of his suffering. If he had been content to talk like everybody else, and think like everybody else, he would never have been persecuted; but because he was different he ran up against opposition, misunderstanding, ostracism and sometimes violent persecution.

Paul tells us that every one of us who will live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution; that is promised to us. But that will encourage you. It means that if you are faithful in that task the suffering will be a sign that you are standing firm and fast, doing what God has sent you to do. Adoniram Judson, that great Baptist missionary who in the 19th century pioneered the gospel in Burma, and planted churches all over that land, endured great personal suffering. His life story was a challenge to me as a young Christian. He said a very significant thing about suffering:

Success and suffering are vitally and organically linked. If you succeed without suffering, it is because someone else has suffered for you without succeeding; and if you suffer without succeeding, it is that someone else may succeed after you.

That is a vital truth. Success and suffering belong together.

Paul had experienced both, so he says to Timothy, "I've been down the road." But his attitude is, "I am not ashamed, of course not. When I see the power of God released, and when I see what changes are coming in others' lives because of my pain, it is as though it is nothing." In another place he says, "I'll gladly be poured out as a drink offering upon the altar in order that you might succeed," {cf, 2 Tim 4:6 KJV}.

Then Paul tells us what his resource is: "I know whom I have believed, and I know that he is able to guard until that Day what has been entrusted to me [the gospel]." To keep me faithful in the gospel, is Paul's implication.

At the Congress on the Bible last week I listened to Jim Boice, who is now the pastor of the historic Tenth Presbyterian Church of Philadelphia. He is a fine Bible teacher, a great expositor of the truth, an apt successor to Donald Grey Barnhouse, who for years pastored that church. Listening to Dr. Boice reminded me of an incident that occurred when Barnhouse was pastor there. He used to have Sunday afternoons dedicated to a meeting with young people from college and high school, who would pack the auditorium in that great church to hear Dr. Barnhouse answer questions from the Bible. On one such occasion a young man asked this question: "Dr. Barnhouse, how could it be that two million Israelites could wander through the wilderness of Sinai, a barren desert, for forty years, and be supplied with adequate food, water and clothing, so that at the end of that forty years it is recorded of them that their clothing had not even worn out?" Dr. Barnhouse's answer was one word. In that deep voice, he replied, "God! Next question, please."

Yes, God is our resource. "I know whom I have believed, and I am persuaded that he is able to keep what I have committed unto him and what he has committed unto me." Our resource is adequate. That is what Paul says to Timothy to encourage his heart.

There is something more yet to encourage Timothy. I will touch on this very quickly. Verse 13:

Follow the pattern of the sound words which you have heard from me, in the faith and love which are in Christ Jesus; {2 Tim 1:13 RSV}

The Word of God is given to us for our resource. It is a pattern to follow, a guide to our behavior, a specific instruction as to what to do when we are up against certain circumstances. That is very significant.

Every one of us in this room today (young people especially) is under a powerful assault from the spirit of the age, expressed through the media, which challenges the morals and the ethical standards of the Bible. This assault makes many of us wonder, at times, if the standards of the world are really so bad after all.

- Many young people are asking themselves, "Is it really wrong to sleep with somebody outside of marriage?" (Recognize that is a euphemism: the thing they do not do is sleep.) "Everybody else is doing it," they say, "everybody says it is not going to hurt anything; no bad results will follow."
- Many a couple today is faced with the thought, "Is it so bad to get a divorce these days? Everybody seems to be doing it. When marriage becomes boring or difficult, what is so bad about breaking up, and getting a partner with whom you feel more compatible? Is that so bad?"
- This time of the year some of us may be thinking, "Why not fudge on my income tax a little. Does the government have to know everything? Can't I keep a little for myself now that financial pressures are so extreme?"

We have all felt this alluring temptation to change our standards. What should you do when all your friends are doing it, urging you to do it, and telling you it is OK? The apostle's advice is: Read your Bible!

"Follow the pattern of sound words." *Sound* means "healthful, wholesome words," words that will lead you ultimately into life. Remember the proverb, "There is a way that seems right to a man, but the ends thereof are the ways of death," {cf, Prov 14:12, 16:25}. "Follow the pattern of sound words":

- "Flee youthful lusts, which war against the soul," {cf, 1 Pet 2:11}.
- "To the married I command (yet not I but the Lord) let not the wife separate from her husband and let not the husband divorce his wife," {cf, 1 Cor 7:10-11}.
- "Pay taxes to whom taxes are due," {cf, Rom 13:6-7}.

And, Paul says, sound words are a channel of "faith and love which are in Christ Jesus."

Have you noticed that when you obey the Word of God, even though it is painful at times and you have to apparently lose something, that it is not very long before the Lord himself is dearer and closer to you than he has ever been before? You experience "the faith and love which are in Christ Jesus."

There is a song that was very much sung in the early days of the Jesus Movement. It is a simple ditty which I do not hear much

any more, but it always seemed to me to express a wonderful word of advice to people under pressure:

Put your hand in the hand of the Man who stilled the waters;
Put your hand in the hand of the Man from Galilee.

He is present, he is available to strengthen from within, so that you can stand in the moment of decision. That is what Paul is saying now to Timothy: "Timothy, remember that the faith which you have is the channel of the power of God let loose among men; and the Book that you hold in your hand is the guide to behavior that leads to life. It will lead you to a closer, dearer expression of the Lord Jesus himself."

Warm, sweet, tender, even yet,
A present help is He,
And faith has still its Olivet,
And love its Galilee

Prayer

Lord, we pray that in these dark days when men are lovers of themselves rather than lovers of God, lovers of pleasure, implacable, violent, selfish, disobedient to parents, that we may be manifestations of a different style of life. We pray that we may be willing to stand, willing to be tested, willing to endure, willing to resist the temptation to be ashamed of the gospel. Help us to look on to that day when all the redeemed shall gather around the throne and praise the name of him who has brought us safely along. Help us to sing anew that great song, "Tis grace has brought us safe thus far, And grace will lead us home." We pray in Jesus' name, Amen.

Title: The Call to Courage
By: Ray C. Stedman
Series: Studies in Second Timothy
Scripture: 2 Tim 1:8-13
Message No: 2
Catalog No: 3783
Date: March 7, 1982

HOW TO DEFEND A LION

by Ray C. Stedman

Almost every Christian alive has heard the famous quotation from Charles Spurgeon, the great English preacher, about defending the Scripture. Spurgeon said, "Scripture is like a lion. Who ever heard of defending a lion? Just turn it loose; it will defend itself." That oft-quoted word has a great deal of truth in it. Notice that it does not deny that lions sometimes need defending; it merely recognizes that the best way to do that is to turn a lion loose and it will defend itself.

The Apostle Paul, in his second letter to Timothy, suggests a similar approach. Writing from his prison cell in Rome to Timothy, who is left all alone in the great, pagan city, Ephesus, Paul tells his young son in the faith (Chapter 1, Verse 14):

Guard the truth which has been entrusted to you by the Holy Spirit who dwells within us. (2 Tim. 1:14 {RSV})

I would like to give you a slightly different, perhaps more accurate, version of what Paul wrote, because that translation suggests that the phrase, "by the Holy Spirit," is linked with the entrusting, i.e., the Spirit has entrusted to Timothy the truth. Actually, that phrase goes with the word *guard*: "Guard by means of the indwelling Spirit the good deposit," is what Paul wrote. The "good deposit" is the gospel, or the Scripture of truth. Though the word *truth* does not actually appear in this verse, it is not inaccurate to render it as this version has, "guard the truth by means of the Spirit."

The great claim of Christianity is not that it is a religion, but that it is the truth; it is the way things really are in life. Dorothy Sayers said, "The test of any religion is not that it pleases us, but that it is true." That is what marks the character of Christian faith -- explaining life the way it really is. That is why, when Jesus taught in his day, every time people heard him say something, inwardly they thought, "Yes, of course. That's right, isn't it?" Jesus was speaking to their experience, even to their unconscious, unarticulated experience, which they felt deeply and which his words explained.

The glory of Christianity is that it is knowledge, knowledge that can free us from the lies that the world in its blindness is

following to its own destruction.

Arnold Grunigen, a well known Christian businessman and leader in the early days of this congregation, used to put it this way: "The Bible is God's instruction book which goes along with man."

When you buy a new car you get a book with it that tells you how it operates and what to do if it does not. When you get a new washing machine or a new toaster you get a book with it. When you buy a personal computer you get a big book with it. God sent us into the world, complicated beings that we are, so it makes sense that he would give us a book that goes along with man. That is what the Bible is, and Timothy is to "guard that truth by means of the indwelling Holy Spirit."

It is very important that we understand what the apostle means here. It is not merely the words of the Book that make it powerful, rather it is the presence of the Spirit enlightening the words of the Book. The Spirit illuminates the Book; he brings it home to the heart. He makes these words living words, penetrating words, powerful words, words that enlighten the mind, pierce the heart, words that produce profound changes in attitude and behavior in mankind. It is true that the words are truth, that this is the Word of God, without error as God gave it to man, but it is the Spirit who makes this Book a living word, and transforms it, if you like, into a powerful lion which is capable of defending itself.

How do you turn the lion loose? That is the question we are facing in this passage and throughout this section. In fact, the first thirteen verses of Chapter 2 will detail for us four ways by which Timothy was expected to turn the lion loose to let him defend himself. We will trace these four things, taking two of them today and two of them next week.

First, the apostle would remind Timothy, and us, of what the times were like in which this "guarding of the truth" was to take place. Verse 15:

You are aware that all who are in Asia turned away from me, and among them Phygelus and Hermogenes. {2 Tim 1:15 RSV}

It would not have been news to Timothy that there had been a great turning away from the authority of the Apostle Paul in Asia. Timothy lived in Ephesus, the capital of the large Roman province of Asia, which was about the size of the State of California. Timothy was expected to teach and to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ in Ephesus, so he faced every day the problem that Paul mentions here.

In fact, Timothy was running into increasing opposition to what Paul taught. I do not think that implies that there was a widespread turning away from Christianity -- a denial of Christ. Rather, there was an attempt to separate Paul from Jesus. This is always the beginning of apostasy -- to deny the authority of an apostle as opposed to that of the Lord himself. This, of course, was something Paul faced everywhere he went because he was not one of the twelve. Jesus had not called him in the days of his flesh. Many people took advantage of that and accused Paul of making himself an apostle. They suggested that his were invented words, that his teachings went beyond what Jesus taught and added to it things that Jesus never intended.

You can still hear that argument on every side today. Even Christians who ought to know better are suggesting that Paul was an encrusted old bachelor who had no use for women. His writings with regard to women ought to be disregarded, they say, because he was speaking out of his own soured experience. These people suggest that we need to pick and choose in Paul's writings as to what is from the Lord and what is not. That is exactly what Timothy was experiencing, and that is what Paul is referring to here.

We do not know exactly who Phygelus and Hermogenes were. They evidently were prominent leaders whom Paul expected to support him. As I read this account, I wondered if they were not among those people, described in Acts 19, in that time of riot and uprising in Ephesus, whom Luke calls "certain Asiarchs" {cf, Acts 19:31 RSV}, i.e., of Roman authorities. Luke said these were friends of the apostle who would be expected, perhaps in a day when Paul was under charge by the Roman government, even facing possible death, to come to his defense, yet they refused to do so. It may be that these were people whom Paul had looked to support him, but they had refused to do so, and he was left alone to defend himself.

At any rate, it is clear that it is hard for Paul to write the statement, "all in Asia have turned against me." Luke records in the book of Acts that just a few years earlier, as a result of Paul's teaching in the rented school of Tyrannus in Ephesus for five hours a day, all the residents of Asia heard the word of the Lord, both Jews and Greeks, (Acts 19:10), What a wonderful awakening that represented! That was a time when the whole province seemed to be alive with the power of the gospel, and thousands were turning to Christ. Yet, a few years later, Paul has to write, "All in Asia have turned against me."

That brought to my memory the scenes, less than ten years ago, when this room was jammed with young people on Sunday nights. They would sit in the aisles and up here on the platform because we had no room to seat them elsewhere. That was part of a great spiritual awakening which we now call the Jesus Movement. Without any apparent reason thousands of young people left the drugs scene, the world of the occult, and the world of profligate sex, and turned to Christ. They began to read their Bibles, and seek after the truth. The whole of the West Coast was electric with excitement as we saw the power of the Word at work in young

people's lives. But today, apathy is apparent on every side. Many of those young people who welcomed the Word with such excitement in those days have faded into the background. There is resistance to the truth, and a turning away from the authority of the apostles. An apostasy has set in.

That is exactly what the apostle is experiencing here. In the words of Dr. E. M. Blaiklock, professor of classics at the University of New Zealand (a wonderful Christian scholar who preached at PBC in the early days), "Of all the centuries, the twentieth is most like the first." It is evident that you and I are living through similar times to what Paul and Timothy are facing here. Even the Christian community is turning away from Christian standards, morals and ethics. Divorce is epidemic among Christians, who ought to be manifesting the ability of the Spirit of God to keep a family united in love and grace and growing in truth and righteousness. Instead, Christians are succumbing to the ways of the world around. Immorality is rife among us; famous names are turning away and forsaking Christian standards. That is what Paul and Timothy were facing.

In the Roman world of that day when this letter was written, (about the year 67 or 68), the whole Roman East was aflame. Like Mt. St. Helens, it was giving evidence that it was about to erupt and explode. Just two or three years later, the Roman armies under Titus would surround Jerusalem and attack the city. They destroyed the temple, killed hundreds of thousands of Jews, and led others off into captivity. All this was about to happen, so that the world of that day was being shaken as the world is being shaken today. Paul's word for such an hour is to "guard the truth by means of the Holy Spirit which has been entrusted to us."

By contrast, there was one man from Asia, Onesiphorus, whom Paul describes as having found a way to "guard the truth" in his day. Here is what Paul says about him (Verses 16-18):

May the Lord grant mercy to the household of Onesiphorus, for he often refreshed me; he was not ashamed of my chains, but when he arrived in Rome he searched for me eagerly and found me -- may the Lord grant him to find mercy from the Lord on that Day -- and you well know all the service he rendered at Ephesus. {2 Tim 1:16-18 RSV}

Onesiphorus means "bringer of help." Here was a man who lived up to his name. He was, evidently, a businessman. Paul had known him and his family when he himself was in Ephesus. There the family and the man had ministered to Paul many times, so he prays a blessing upon them.

In his business travels, Onesiphorus had come to the city of Rome after Paul had been captured. Painstakingly, at great effort, he sought and found the apostle. That was not easy to do. The Romans were not telling everybody where Paul was imprisoned, but Onesiphorus kept looking until he found him. And he was not ashamed of Paul's chains. He found him at great risk to his own life, for, to befriend an enemy of Caesar in those days was to put one's own life in peril. Nero would eliminate anybody for the slightest deviation from a manifestation of loyal support of him and his plan.

Onesiphorus ministered to Paul and refreshed his spirit. He did not come gloomily wringing his hands, beating his breast and talking about how terrible things were all through the Empire. He came with confidence that God was still in charge and upholding things. Here Paul prays for him now that he is still away, probably on another trip somewhere, and he asks Timothy to support his family there and prays that God would bless him "on that Day."

By his life and his actions, here is a man who found the way to turn the lion loose in his own time. Onesiphorus was fearless, he was faithful, and he was cheerful. He reminds me of that favorite definition I have used many times of how a Christian ought to be:

- ❑ Completely fearless,
- ❑ Continually cheerful, and
- ❑ Constantly in trouble.

Paul now returns to Timothy and gives him step-by-step instructions on how he can guard the truth, how he can turn the lion loose in a day of widespread declension and apostasy. This passage runs on through Verse 13, but we are only going to take two verses this morning. Chapter 2, Verses 1-2:

You then, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus, and what you have heard from me before many witnesses entrust to faithful men who will be able to teach others also. {2 Tim 2:1-2 RSV}

The first thing you have to do when things start falling apart, Paul says, is to be strong yourself in the grace that is in Christ Jesus; that is a fundamental principle of helping anybody. You can only pass on to others what you yourself have received. Head knowledge is of no value. If you merely pass on a knowledge of the truth -- teaching people the various doctrines of Christianity -- you have done nothing to help them at all. Unless they can see that *that* truth has changed you and made you different, that you speak out of the experience of having been altered by the truth you believe, you will never do anything to help someone else

stand in the hour of danger. If you want to strengthen others, Paul's advice is, start with yourself: "Be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus." That is the way to guard the truth. That is what Onesiphorus had done. He was strong, he was able to withstand the fear and the pressures of his day because he had found that Christ could strengthen him. So he becomes an example to Timothy and to us of how to stand in an evil day.

That which strengthens is grace, Paul says, "the grace that is in Christ Jesus." A peculiar thing about grace is, it is never available to strong people. That is what makes it difficult for us to get hold of it sometimes. We are continually assaulted today with a barrage of propaganda teaching us that the way to be strong is to develop some quality about ourselves, some hidden power, some reserve of personality, some right that we need to demand and stand on and insist upon that. But if you believe your Bible, that is the way to be weak -- and that is what proves to be the case. God's grace alone is strong enough to handle the pressures of a fallen world, but the only way you can lay hold of the grace of God is to acknowledge that you are so weak you do not have anything else that will hold you. So the first thing that grace demands is that we admit our weakness, not our strength.

Many today are unable to be strong and unable to stand in the day of pressure, although they give great testimony about how they are going to follow Christ and stand for him. In the moment of pressure, however, they go down almost instantly. They have bought the lie of the world that if they just make up their mind, that if by their will or their effort they display their tremendous natural gifts, or if they develop some power to ride over the rights of others, they can stand. Not a day goes by but we are exposed to invitations to send away for this course or sign up for that one that will teach us how to stand up for our own rights. There is even a course offered today on how to intimidate others. That is the spirit of the age. But Paul's word is that the way to strength is to discover "the grace that is in Christ Jesus." Recognize your own weakness and then accept God's promise to work with you and through you in your weakness to make it strong. That is how it works.

Christians are to be forever learning to say, "I can't live up to this demand, I can't do this thing that is asked of me, but he can, therefore I can." Take the action based upon the expectation that God is in you and he will enable you to do what you otherwise cannot do. That is authentic Christianity. It is supernatural. Natural strength is its greatest enemy. When we learn that, we can be "strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus."

J. Hudson Taylor, founder of the China Inland Mission, was a marvelous exemplification of what we are talking about. Here is a quotation from his writings:

It makes no matter where he places me or how; that is rather for him to consider than me. For the easiest positions he must give me grace, and in the most difficult, his grace is sufficient. So, if God places me in great perplexity, must he not give me much guidance; in positions of great difficulty, much grace; in circumstances of great pressure and trial, much strength? As to work, mine was never so plentiful, so responsible or so difficult, but the weight and the strain are all gone. His resources are mine, for He is mine.

That is a Christian response to the pressures of the day. I love to hear a congregation sing the hymn, "Amazing Grace," especially when they put the emphasis upon the "zing." That is what grace does: it puts zing into life. "Amazing grace how sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me."

That is what Paul is writing to Timothy. So if you want others to be pure, learn to be pure yourself, by "the grace that is in Christ Jesus"; and if you want others to stand, then learn to stand yourself by "the grace that is in Christ Jesus." That is the place to start. If you cannot demonstrate it in your own life, you will get nowhere trying to communicate it to others.

But if you start there, then the next step is, as Paul points out, "what you have heard from me before many witnesses entrust to faithful men who will be able to teach others also." Pass it on; communicate it; let them see what you have learned. Let them see the struggles and the temporary failures that you went through in the learning of it.

That is why Paul adds these words, "before many witnesses." Timothy had accompanied Paul on many journeys. He had often heard him preach and teach; he was with him when he addressed pagans and at times when he addressed Christians. He heard the marvelous truths that the apostle understood which fleshed out all the words that Jesus had said. He saw the tremendous impact these words had made upon various people, both for good and for bad; some words that led to life, and other words that seemed to lead some to death. He must have discussed this frequently with Paul. He saw the hurt and the opposition that introduced into the apostle's life, the struggles Paul had as a result of faithfully proclaiming the truth. Timothy also saw the fantastic blessing that spread, the tremendous changes that were introduced, and the lifting of a whole level of a community's life because of the truth as it is in Jesus. So, Paul says, "What you have heard and seen and learned from me, pass it on to faithful men."

How do you tell a faithful man? (That is a generic term that includes both men and women.) How do you tell faithful people who can learn truth? Let me share with you four qualities I look for in someone in order to pass on what I myself have learned.

- First, I look for a searching mind, a mind that is ready to learn, a mind that has given evidence, both in secular and sacred ways, that it wants to know something. Such a mind is not content to pass through life with a radio blaring, or a

TV on, being entertained all the time. It wants to learn, to search out truth, to listen to what is going on around; it is willing to think about it, to meditate on it and explore its application. That is the first thing: a searching mind.

- Then I look for a humble heart, for somebody who has already learned that truth is bigger than he is. He will have learned that we are to set aside our own egos, that truth is not given to us in order to build up our image in the eyes of people, that we are not to manipulate people to gain standing or prestige among them, but we are to be willing to submit ourselves, to put ourselves down and not seek credit; a humble heart.
- The third thing is an evident gift. That is what Paul says here. Look for someone who is "able to teach others also," somebody who has a gift of the Spirit that can communicate and impart to others what he himself has learned. That is a process of duplication and reduplication that will rapidly spread truth throughout a body of people; an evident gift.
- The fourth thing I look for is a faithful spirit, somebody who has demonstrated by a track record that he does not quit when the going gets tough. He is not ready to leave when some more enticing thing comes along, when the skiing gets good or the sun is hitting the beach, but he is willing to stay with what he has committed himself to; a faithful spirit.

A searching mind, a humble heart, an evident gift, a faithful spirit; when you find such as those, commit yourself to them. Paul says to Timothy, "Give yourself and everything you know to such men because they will pass it on to others, and soon the truth will spread."

I was recently in touch with a church which, when it was founded a couple of decades ago, had great understanding of the truth about the church, about the gifts of the Spirit, about the nature of elder leadership, and the authority of the Lord Jesus in the midst of his people. Because of its commitment to truth, for a long time that church made a tremendous impression in the area in which it is located. But of late it has been going through severe struggles. It has had one serious split, and now it is gradually becoming more and more an ordinary church, merely fitting itself into the usual plan and program of the church. I asked one of the elders of that church what had gone wrong. His answer was, "It was our (the elders') fault. We did not pass on to the newer elders what we ourselves believed."

All of us live just one generation away from total apostasy. The work of the church can fall apart in one generation if we do not faithfully pass on what we ourselves know -- parents to children, elders to the younger ones, leaders to those who follow; "faithful men and women who are able to teach others also." That is God's process of supporting and spreading truth and helping it to stand in the hour of attack.

I do not think there is any greater testimony to that than what has happened in China. When the missionaries were thrust out of China in 1950, Christians everywhere wrung their hands and said, "This is terrible. China will go back into the dark ages under the Communist heel. The poor Christians there will be reduced to nothing." But the truth has now become evident. The door is open to China again, and Christians who went back in found that the church had increased numerically sevenfold over what it was when the missionaries left.

I have always maintained that God's most significant approach to evangelizing a city is to begin by locking all the preachers up in jail. Remember that Paul wrote to the Philippians, "Many of the brethren are much more bold to preach the gospel because of my imprisonment," {cf, Phil 1:14 RSV}. That is God's method of spreading the church. When you and I look around and see the apostasy that is setting in, in our day, among Christians in the church, we must remember, as the poet James Russell Lowell put it:

Though the cause of evil prosper,
Yet 'tis truth alone that's strong.
Truth forever on the scaffold,
Wrong forever on the throne.
Yet that scaffold sways the future,
And behind the dim unknown,
Standeth God within the shadows
Keeping watch above his own.

"Truth crushed to earth shall rise again," is a famous, oft-quoted saying. How true it is.

What then do you do in the day of declension, when people are turning away from Christianity? How do you let loose the lion that he might defend himself? Paul says there are four steps which we can take. We have looked at two of them: Practice a daily communion with the Lord Jesus yourself; and then communicate that to faithful men and women around you.

In the remainder of the passage Paul goes on to speak of the necessity for an earnest, dedicated commitment of the will, and of a confidence in the power of God that will continue to stand in the midst of pressure. We will look at that next week.

In the meantime, let us start to put into practice what he exhorts us to here -- a daily communion with Jesus himself, and a communicating of it to those with whom we have influence.

Prayer

Lord, we thank you for calling us to stand in this evil day. We know we are not living in a world that is going to minister to our comfort and please our indulgence very long; for that which can be shaken is about to be shaken. All the world seems about to fall apart around us; we cannot avoid it by hiding our heads in the sand. Grant that we may be faithful Christians who have learned how to guard the truth by means of the Holy Spirit in order that the lion of truth, made powerful by the Spirit, may be loosed among men and women in our day; and we will see the truth surmount its enemies and rise up to bless the world yet. We ask in Jesus' name, Amen.

Title: How to Defend a Lion
By: Ray C. Stedman
Series: Studies in Second Timothy
Scripture: 2 Tim 1:14 - 2:2
Message No: 3
Catalog No: 3784
Date: March 14, 1982

SOLDIERS, ATHLETES, AND FARMERS

by Ray C. Stedman

The business of Christians in any age is to guard the truth which has been entrusted to them. That was the Apostle Paul's charge to Timothy in Second Timothy 1:14: "Guard the truth which has been entrusted to you." In Chapter 2 of that letter we are exploring four ways by which this is accomplished. As Christians, it is necessary for us to understand that must be done in every age.

The 1st century world in which Timothy lived was one of distorted values, misleading commitments, confused thinking, and dangerous misconceptions. As a result, the whole Roman world was about to explode with violence. In the east, the Jewish revolt, which would culminate with the armies of Titus besieging Jerusalem for a couple of years, had begun. Finally, the Temple would be destroyed, the Jews slaughtered, and other carried away into captivity among the nations. All this was just around the corner.

Today, we live in a similar kind of age. The modern proverb, "What you see is not what you get," is sharp testimony to the fact that ours is a deceitful age. We live in a world of deep trouble. I saw some frightening statistics the other day on the mounting rate of teenage suicide. As despair spreads like a blanket across our world, young people are losing hope for the future. They see no reason why they should struggle with life, so they are taking their own lives. There are many other manifestations of unrest and evil in our day too: child abuse, widespread public pornography, muggings and rapes, students who cannot seem to learn to even read or write in our school systems.

The great question of life in this day, as it was in Paul's day, is, "How can you guard the truth? How do you preserve sanity in an insane world?" Paul's answer to that question is fourfold:

His first word is, "You then, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus" (Chapter 2, Verse 1). That is, in order to keep the faith and guard the truth, you yourself must be strong; and that is achieved by learning to rely on the only reliable source in a day of declension -- "The grace that is in Christ Jesus."

I submit to you that those are much more than mere religious words; they are words of great, practical value. The only way you can keep your inner life strong is by a relationship to the Living God. That has been proven again and again in human history. If you think you can stand against the forces of today's world by leaning on your friends, your family, your guru, your psychiatrist, or your counselor, you will find they will crumble when you need them most. The only reliable source of strength in a day in which the world is falling apart is what Paul calls here, "The grace that is in Christ Jesus." We sing that in our hymns: "On Christ the solid rock I stand; all other ground is sinking sand." That expresses what the apostle is saying here.

The second thing Paul says is to pass that on to others who will be able to hand it on to still others. He says, "What you have heard from me before many witnesses entrust to faithful men who will be able to teach others also" (Chapter 2, Verse 2). There is a tremendous responsibility to communicate truth to your children, to your friends, and to your neighbors.

That word is not addressed to young pastors only; it is addressed to Christians everywhere. We all are expected to be

communicators of the truth, to pass on what we ourselves are deeply convinced is true. That is the second step in "guarding the truth."

This morning we come to the third and fourth steps, which are presented in the verses immediately following, beginning with Verse 3 of Chapter 2, and continuing through Verse 13. The third step is given in these words:

Take your share of [or, Share in] suffering as a good soldier of Christ Jesus. No soldier on service gets entangled in civilian pursuits, since his aim is to satisfy the one who enlisted him. An athlete is not crowned unless he competes according to the rules. It is the hard-working farmer who ought to have the first share of the crops. {2 Tim 2:3-6 RSV}

Those three very expressive metaphors which Paul uses add up to saying one thing: in a world that is falling apart, Christians must commit themselves without reserve to obey the Lord Jesus Christ. Basically, what the apostle is saying is, surrender your options; give up any other objective; burn your bridges. Resolutely follow your Lord. Admit no alternatives. Set yourselves to live a Christian lifestyle wherever you are, whatever you are doing, and refuse all others.

Paul says to do that requires the dedication of a soldier, the discipline of an athlete, and the diligence of a farmer. That is very necessary for our day, because in every generation there are Christian hangers-on who really are not Christians at all. What tells the story is how much they are willing to endure hardness as a good soldier of Jesus Christ.

That will take, as Paul suggests, the dedication of a soldier. There are two things he brings out in that:

First, it involves suffering: "Share in suffering as a good soldier of Christ Jesus." In one sense, I am grateful for the realism of television and movies today with regard to war. It used to be that young men would go away to war with bands playing and banners flying. It looked like they were doing a glorious thing. But we know better now. Thanks to television and movies, we have seen the awful gore, the blood, and mud, sweat and tears of war paraded before us.

That is one reason why a great protest is rising from the younger generation of our day against what they rightly see as the madness of war. War is an evil thing; there is nothing glorious about it. War results in death, the maiming of bodies and the destruction of minds, oftentimes of innocent people. War is an ugly and a vicious thing. No one in his right mind defends it. What young people have to understand, however, is that war is part of the consequences of evil in human society, so it is unavoidable. War is a judgment from God on all the nations involved in it because of the toleration of injustice, oppression and corruption which has been winked at, and even approved of, for many years. War is the result. We cannot avoid it, nor can young people avoid it either. We have to see that war is part of the evil in society.

A soldier has to suffer. War is not a picnic. A soldier does not go out to enjoy life, to see the world, and have many wonderful experiences of adventure and travel, despite what the recruitment posters say. That does have some element of truth about it, but that is not what one does as a soldier. If warfare breaks out, it is going to mean he is faced with ugly, arduous, uncomfortable living.

Paul is saying that the Christian faces the same thing. We are not called to be Christians to merely enjoy life, to have everything around us pleasant and comfortable. That has been the deadly danger of evangelical Christianity for far too many decades. Because of that, today we are facing some of the evil aspects that have come from that kind of thinking. No, says the apostle, we are to endure hardness, we are to get involved with life at its most wretched, and sometimes most uncomfortable, expression.

These last few weeks, our Board of Elders has been in a process of evaluating pastors, staff members and other elders. In his report to us, one pastor included a vivid description of his ministry, which I would like to share with you. This is what he said:

Adding to the adventure [of his ministry] is the wide spectrum of problems that unfolds. There are all forms of anger, from long-standing resentment and unforgiveness, to rebellion, violence, child-beating, mutilating, wife-torture, threats against life, murder-for-hire, and Mafia-related revenge. There are the sexual offenses of rape, incest, sodomy, homosexuality, gang sex, swingers, bestiality, fornication, and the ever-present adultery. There are marital problems of every kind: attempted or contemplated suicide (and an occasional successful suicide), abortions and adoptions. I see many family problems between parents, or single parents and children. There are also the addicts of every sort: alcoholics, drugaholics, foodaholics, workaholics, sexaholics, spendaholics. There are the institutionalized, either coming from or going to, a prison, hospital, detox unit, mental facility; there are the psychotic to deal with. There are the quieter problems of legal, finances, and career; questions about a specific passage of Scripture, or those who simply want to know about PBC. The problems I have just recalled from memory are representative of cases that have been in my office or home over the past twelve or eighteen months.

That is a slice of real life. And it is not only pastors who are called to that kind of ministry; we all are to some degree. Those things are happening all around us. We are to be involved in trying to work them out, to share in the pain, the hurt and the suffering that may be involved. That is what Paul is saying: "Endure suffering, take your share of it, as a good soldier of Jesus

Christ."

The second thing about a soldier is that he requires a degree of single-mindedness; soldiers have only one objective: "A soldier does not get entangled with civilian pursuits, but his aim is to satisfy the one who enlisted him."

That was particularly true in the Roman army; a commander would gather around him men who knew him, loved him, trusted him and would follow him anywhere. Those were the ones who won the great battles for Rome.

The apostle picks that up and says that is the way Christians ought to be. Our one objective is not to get something for ourselves and something for the Lord, but to please him.

And it is not to be a twofold objective: we are not to be good Christians and try to get rich too; we are not to be good Christians and try to be famous or to have pleasurable experiences all our life long. That is not single-mindedness; that is the "double-minded man who is unstable in all his ways," (James 1:8 {RSV}). But being a Christian does not mean that we cannot use our gifts and our natural talents. We are to employ ourselves in various endeavors; there is nothing wrong with that. Paul was a tentmaker; some of the disciples were fishermen. Those pursuits are proper, but they are not to be the great objective in life, that is the point. Christianity is not a way of doing special things; it is a special way of doing everything. The objective is that, in the midst of whatever we do, whatever our line of business, we are manifesting the character of Jesus Christ. We are seeking to be pleasing to him.

There is a type of Christianity around today, which I have learned to call "Amway Christianity," which suggests that God's reason for coming into your life is to make you rich. It says that if you are faithful to him, if you are a good, hardworking salesman, you will end up wearing furs and driving Cadillacs, and that is the sign of God's blessing upon your ministry. Nothing could be further from the truth of the New Testament. There you find that Christians sometimes expected to have their property taken away, and they accepted that with good grace. The letter to the Hebrews commends the Christians for having accepted with rejoicing the spoil and the loss of their property because they knew they had a better home in heaven; they were looking for a city which has foundations which God alone would build. That is the Christian position.

The only objective of the Christian soldier should be to follow the Lord Jesus. The motive here is one of love. Not duty, but love. It is a conviction that the One you are following is Lord of heaven and earth, and that he has already done so much for you that your proper response is to be available to him to be used wherever he wants you to be used. "Unto him who loved us," says John in Revelation, "and washed us from our sins in his own blood," {Rev 1:5b KJV}. We sing that in our hymns too:

"Amazing love how can it be,
that thou my God wouldst die for me."

That is the motivation of a Christian soldier.

Then, says the apostle, the Christian lifestyle requires the discipline of an athlete: "An athlete is not crowned unless he competes according to the rules." There is a different motivation. It is really a form of ambition, but a very proper ambition. Every athlete learns that he has to deny himself certain things if he wants to win. He cannot eat just any kind of food; he has to give up chocolate sundaes, strawberry shortcake, and all the rich, luxurious indulgences that others can freely have. He may have to sit and eat cardboard while others enjoy something else, but he does it. The athlete does not indulge in certain pleasures. He does not go in for late nights, wild living, revelings, carousings and drunkenness that others may go in for. He resolutely predetermines that he is not going to involve himself in those, so that when the occasion arises he says, No. He does not indulge in certain vices. He gives up smoking and drinking because it hurts and harms the body.

The athlete does so because he wants to win; that is the point. He wants to be "crowned." (That is what the apostle speaks of here.) These crowns are not something we earn by our faithfulness. Rather, they represent a test (we will see more of that in a moment) that reveals whether we really are athletes for Christ or not; they represent a proper goal in our life. We do not want to lose out on what God has for us; we want to achieve all that he has made available, so we are ready to say no to many things in order to gain that.

I hope many of you have seen the film, *Chariots of Fire*. That is probably one of the best films showing today. It is the story of an athlete who wants to win, but he wants to win with honor, and he is ready to deny himself the joy of winning if he has to win without honor. The film is a moving presentation, based on a true story, of a young man who, in the early part of this century, was an outstanding runner in England. It depicts for us so much of what Paul is saying here.

A Christian is called to say "No" to many things today. There are visual stimuli on every side that tempt us to give in, to indulge ourselves, to seize hold of life and enjoy it now. But a Christian soldier has to say, "No! I won't do it. Those things lead to distraction, to disruption and to a lessening of spiritual intensity in my life; I won't do them." That is the discipline of an athlete.

Then, says the apostle, the Christian also needs the diligence of a farmer: "It is the hardworking farmer who ought to have the first share of the crops."

The emphasis there is upon the word, *hard-working*. Being a Christian is not just floating through life with God working for you. Rather, it is you working for God, enjoying the privilege of being his faithful servant through whom he does his work today. There is no greater calling than that. Yet, the attitude of many Christians today is, "I've become a Christian in order to get God to bless me, and work for me. If he doesn't do it the way I want, I'm ready to quit. I don't want anything to do with Christianity when it gets difficult." That's the very thing the apostle is warning against in this passage.

Being a Christian takes long hours of labor. A Christian is called upon to reprogram the computer of his mind to think differently than other people think. That is not accomplished easily. It takes hours of reading the Bible and reading books about the Bible, until you see life the way the Bible sees it. It takes, perhaps, hours of listening to tapes, attending services, sharing and relating with other Christians how they are struggling and letting them see how you are. It takes diligent labor. It is not something that comes automatically because you happen to be a Christian.

Like a farmer, we might have to rise up early and work hard, we do so in expectation of a harvest. Paul always sets before us that life is not the end of the story, that what we may have to give up here is made up for abundantly when we step out of time into eternity. That is the day for which we labor.

Some of you may be saying, "If it is like that, count me out! Why should I give up many of life's pleasures for that kind of a grueling experience?"

Let me point out that the apostle goes on to give five marvelous encouragements that also accompany the Christian service. Yes, it will be hard. It will mean saying "No." It will mean working hard at times; but it has some tremendous, positive blessings that go along with it.

Here is the first one (Verse 7):

Think over what I say, for the Lord will grant you understanding in everything. {2 Tim 2:7 RSV}

That means, meditate on what Paul is talking about. Think about the Scriptures, not only as to what they mean -- as important as that is -- but how they fit. It is only as you start to think deeply about the Scriptures that you see that they are indeed the Book that goes with man.

The Scriptures have the explanation for the pressures you are going through. They are the analysis of the psychological difficulties that you yourself or others around you may be experiencing. They offer the only practical solution to the problems you yourself are facing. That is what you see as you think through the Scriptures. You see yourself differently. You learn to look at others differently. You see forces and powers at work that secular minds do not understand. You look at life differently, and the glorious thing is, you see how it fits: Here is the answer! For the first time, perhaps, you start to live realistically. That is the first encouragement. The puzzles and mysteries of life that baffle so many come to at least partial answers in the Christian's grasp of what God is doing today.

The second encouragement is the presence of a resurrected, and yet very human, Lord:

Remember Jesus Christ, risen from the dead, descended from David, as preached in my gospel, {2 Tim 2:8 RSV}

There is Paul's own personal word given to his beloved son in the faith of the secret of sustaining himself in the hour of pressure: "Remember Jesus Christ, risen from the dead." Paul says that he who stood on the other side of the grave and said, "All power in heaven and on earth is given unto me" {cf, Matt 28:18 KJV}, is the One who is with you in the midst of your problem. When you remember that you will have a source of strength that nothing of the secular world can ever supply or rival. There is nothing like the realization that the Lord Jesus, the risen Lord, King of Kings and Lord of Lords, "He who opens and no man shuts, He who shuts and no man opens" {cf, Rev 3:7}, is working with you in your very situation. That is what gives a sense of hope when others see the situation as utterly hopeless. Christians hang on when everybody else quits, because they see that a resurrected Lord is at work; and resurrection power works best in a cemetery.

But Jesus is not only resurrected, he is human. He is descended from David; he is one of us; he has been where we are. He knows what we are going through. All of the frustration, the sense of despair and hopelessness flooded against him as it does against us, yet he stood, and now he helps us to stand. That is where strength comes from. As Christians understand this, they need less and less to turn to other human beings for help. Not that we ever wipe out the ministry of the rest of the body to ourselves, but we need it less and less in that desperate type of response that so many of us have manifested.

The third encouragement here is in Verse 9. Paul speaks of,

... the gospel for which I am suffering and wearing fetters like a criminal. But the word of God is not fettered. {2 Tim 2:9 RSV}

What difference does it make that you may be limited? Paul was. He was chained to a Roman guard in a prison. He could not get outside the boundaries of that dark cell. The whole world was ready to burst into flames, yet he was not frustrated because the Word of God was not bound. It had been turned loose in society; it was being passed along from person to person. Paul could quietly sit and wait for the results to come in.

One of the things that encourages me greatly about PBC is that because of the preaching of the Word of truth that has gone out from here, letters pour into this place every week from all over the world, telling us of blessing and change, deliverance, freedom and liberty that have come into lives because the Word of God has set people free. If nothing else ever happened in this place, if we never had another successful meeting, the record of what has already gone out would encourage and bless our hearts for years to come. The Word of God is never bound. Though we may be bound, the Scripture is not.

In line with that, the fourth encouragement concerns the deliverance of others (Verse 10):

Therefore I endure everything for the sake of the elect, that they also may obtain the salvation which in Christ Jesus goes with eternal glory. {2 Tim 2:10 RSV}

Some must suffer in order that others might be saved. I do not understand that fully, but that is what the apostle says. He was quite willing, he says, to put up with all the hardness and deprivation of his day, the uncomfortableness of being a prisoner in chains, the lack of adequate food, the loneliness of the many hours, the boredom that he had to face from many weary, waiting days, because there was the absolute assurance that when he was willing to suffer, others were being delivered as a result. Remember the quotation I gave you a couple weeks ago from Adoniram Judson, the great missionary to Burma, as he pointed out the link between suffering and success:

"If you succeed without suffering, it is because someone else has suffered in order that you might succeed. If you suffer without succeeding, it is in order that someone behind you might succeed without suffering."

The apostle refers to this in many places. In the letter to the Colossians he speaks of being called to "fill up the affliction of Christ for his body's sake" {cf, Col 1:24b}, and how glad he is to do that.

It is an encouragement to know that when we have to go through hard times, pressured times, periled times, somebody is being strengthened, somebody else is going to reap a rich reward of blessing and experience of glory. God does not deal in what Dietrich Bonhoeffer calls, "cheap grace." Grace is free to all of us, anybody can take it, but somebody has been involved in the suffering that made it possible. When we sit here in this room, with the open Bible before us, we so easily forget that this Book comes to us saturated with the blood, sweat, and tears of men and women of the past. Men have been burned at the stake that we might have this Book in English, and be able to read it. Men and women have died in chains, they have been tortured, and torn asunder, in order that we might have this Book. We must never forget that, in a fallen world, there is going to be suffering when the Word of truth is dispensed among men. If we are called upon to suffer, then someone else is going to reap the rewards.

The last encouragement is the certainty we have of a crown that awaits (Verses 11-13):

**The saying is sure:
If we have died with him, we shall also live with him;
if we endure, we shall also reign with him;
if we deny him, he also will deny us;
if we are faithless, he remains faithful --
for he cannot deny himself. {2 Tim 2:11-13 RSV}**

That, undoubtedly, is part of an early Christian hymn which the apostle quotes to encourage us. In God's sight, there is always a direct link between the difficulties we may have as believers here and the joy and glory that await beyond. "If we endure with him, we shall also reign with him"; we have already seen that.

It is wrong to read those verses as though they mean that by your suffering and your enduring hardship you win the right to a crown. That is never the case in the Scriptures. We do not win a reward; we do not merit anything from God ever; no faithful service puts God in our debt and obliges him to give us a reward.

What these verses are saying is that this is a test of the reality of our faith: If we really are Christ's, if he has genuinely come to dwell within us, that fact will always manifest itself by our willingness to suffer with him; to give up some things for Christ's

sake, to resolutely set ourselves against the allurements and temptations of this age and live a different lifestyle. That is the manifestation of true Christian life. If that is there, then, of course, it is absolutely certain that we shall share with him because we belong to him.

But if we are not willing to suffer, if the moment our Christianity begins to pinch a little bit -- if we are asked to give up something that we enjoy doing and live in a way that is not approved of, or even laughed at, by the world around us -- we have to wonder if that is not telling us that our Christianity is a fraud. "If we deny him, he also will deny us." He knows what is real and what is not real about us. If we are simply using Christianity to get God to do some nice things for us, this will be the test of it: When the moment of pressure comes we will give Christianity up; we will fade back into the woodwork, as thousands are doing today, under the pressures arising in our time. If that is the case, then he who knew all along what was true of us will, in the hour of manifestation of all the secrets of men's hearts, say to us -- as he said he would say to many who came to him saying, "Lord, Lord, have we not done many mighty works in your name?" -- "Depart from me. I never knew you," {cf, Matt 7:22-23 RSV}.

But, "if we are faithless" -- there is Paul's recognition that even when we do have his life in us, and we are willing to suffer, there are times when we give in, we are weak, we fail and fumble and stumble, we are faithless, like Peter, when he denied his Lord -- "He remains faithful, for he cannot deny himself." If he is in us, he will hold us safe until the end. He will restore us; he will bring us back. He will labor through abundant and wonderful ways to turn us away from that which has temporarily derailed us. He will bring us back at last to humility, to repentance, and confession of our evil, to a restoration, so that we walk on with him by grace.

The apostle is saying here that this life is a testing ground where we have been put, in order to manifest openly before the watching world and creation whether we really are Christians or not. That is the ultimate test.

Those are sobering words. We are coming into the times that try men's souls, times when we need to take these things very seriously. These are the times that test the reality of our faith. Whether we stand or fall is going to determine whether we really have the grace that is in Christ Jesus, and will submit ourselves to the necessary dedication of a soldier, the discipline of an athlete, and the diligence of a farmer, that we might see the results in abundant harvest to the glory of God. That is the Christian life to which we have been called.

Title: Soldiers, Athletes, and Farmers

By: Ray C. Stedman

Series: Studies in Second Timothy

Scripture: 2 Tim 2:3-13

Message No: 4

Catalog No: 3785

Date: March 21, 1982

AVOIDING CONGREGATIONAL GANGRENE

by Ray C. Stedman

In our study of the Apostle Paul's second letter to Timothy, today we come to a major division of the epistle. Paul has been addressing the question of how to stand firm as a Christian, how to maintain the truth in a world that is falling apart. That is a very relevant issue to our own times, and we have seen much of great help to us in this letter. But now, at the fourteenth verse of the second chapter, a new subject is introduced, because Paul is addressing a new tactic of the enemy. The devil is very clever in his attack upon Christians and Christianity.

Years ago, the delightful English preacher, Joe Blinco, who was then a member of the Billy Graham team, used to say, "The devil is no mere pimple squeezer; he goes for the jugular vein."

That is true. Living in a world that is under the control of the one whom Jesus himself called "the god of this world" {2 Cor 4:4, cf, Luke 4:5-8} is not a game.

The devil has many tactics. He may seek to destroy the truth by patronizing Christianity and Christians. He may try to do so by popularity -- by diverting the attention of Christians away from why they are sent into the world. He has destroyed many a Christian witness that way. He may, as we have been seeing in this letter, bring about sharp persecution; he may try to paralyze us by fear, and by societal rejection; or he may bring about a polarization, an attempt to divide the body.

That is what we find introduced in this section, where the apostle is dealing with the two-front war that these Ephesian Christians are facing -- persecution from outside, and polarization from within the body. Second Timothy 2:14:

Remind them of this, and charge them before the Lord to avoid disputing about words, which does no good, but only ruins the hearers. Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a workman who has no need to be ashamed, rightly handling the word of truth. Avoid such godless chatter, for it will lead people into more and more ungodliness, and their talk will eat its way like gangrene. {2 Tim 2:14-17a RSV}

Those are very sharp and effective metaphors which the apostle employs to describe what was going on in the church at Ephesus. They were disputing about words; there were church squabbles breaking out, and they were dividing into factions over what the apostle literally calls, *word battles*. That is the meaning of the term translated here, "disputing about words." Many churches fall into that trap today. The words in question, of course, represented doctrinal viewpoints. The church has often struggled with trying to define doctrine in words. The words themselves are all right, but what is wrong is the battles that are waged over the words.

One of the outstanding examples in church history in this regard occurred during the days of the Reformation. Toward the end of his life, Martin Luther became engaged in a controversy with the Swiss Christians over the meaning of the Lord's words, "This is my body," when Jesus instituted the Lord's Supper. Those words became the subject of a great controversy that split the force of the Reformation. Under Martin Luther's teaching, the Lutherans maintained that those words were to be taken literally (that the bread really becomes, or is, the body of Christ), while the Swiss Christians maintained that the words were a figurative expression (that the words meant, "this represents my body"). Both sides argued at great length, and the Reformation was almost brought to a halt by the controversy.

In an attempt to heal the dispute, Count von Zwingli, the leader of the Swiss group, brought a delegation to Germany to meet with Martin Luther. When Luther entered the room where the meeting was to take place, he strode over to the large table, and, taking a piece of chalk, he wrote across the length of the table the Latin words, *Hoc est corpus meum* ("This is my body"). That was his stand. Whenever the other side tried to enter into discussion, Luther would refuse and again quote the words, *Hoc est corpus meum*. The controversy was not settled, and the Reformation was severely limited as a result.

Christians can engage in word battles that are destructive in the extreme. Earlier in church history, a noteworthy quarrel raged over two words which sounded almost alike. (Actually, there was a difference of just one letter between them.) After the Council of Nicea, in the 5th century, Christians were debating the nature of Jesus, whether he was of the same substance as the Father, i.e., God himself, or whether he was of a like substance as the Father. The words in Greek are, *homoiousious* (which means "like substance"), or, *homoosious* (which means, "of the same substance"). That battle divided the whole camp of Christendom, and the effects of it are still visible in the ecclesiastical world today.

As a boy, I remember being involved in a congregational debate over whether immersion or sprinkling was the proper mode of baptism.

Sometimes churches split over eschatology -- is the rapture of the church going to be post-tribulation or pre-tribulation? Entire churches have split over such word battles.

Today, the word that threatens to divide many Christians is, "inerrancy." That is a good word. It means that the Scriptures were given to us from the mouth of God through the voices and pens of men in an inerrant fashion, i.e., without error, scientifically, historically, or theologically. That is a good doctrine -- I believe it myself -- but what often happens is that people choose up sides. They get so involved in defending, fighting, and arguing about that word they forget that the best way to defend the power of the Scripture is to proclaim it; turn the Scripture loose, let it defend itself. That is what Paul tells Timothy to do -- teach and share with others the truth that he has learned.

Timothy is told to do four things about the *word battle* in Ephesus. These guidelines will be helpful to us too, if we are engaged in a controversy of this sort:

The first thing the apostle says is,

**Remind them of this, and charge them before the Lord to avoid disputing about words.
{2 Tim 2:14a RSV}**

Timothy was to solemnly plead with them, earnestly reminding them that as brothers and sisters in the Lord they are not to engage in such battles.

As the Battle of Trafalgar was about to begin, Admiral Nelson came across two officers of his own flagship who were arguing hotly and about to take sword to each other. Nelson stepped between them and said, "Stop." Then, pointing to the French fleet, he said, "There is the enemy."

Christians need to remember that. We are not to be engaged in debates that get so intense and so hot that we forget what the Lord has sent us to do. Quarreling over words does no good, so Timothy was to plead earnestly with them to avoid such disputes.

I have been present at several church quarrels, and it is very evident that it is true that no further light is ever shed when a controversy gets heated. Nobody is bringing out truth; they are simply hammering away at each other with the Bible. Division, not unity, comes out of that. No witness before the world is increased because of church squabbles, but quite the opposite.

Further, Paul says, "it leads to catastrophe." The word *ruins* here ("only ruins the hearers"), is literally the word, "catastrophe." Church quarrels can lead to catastrophic events.

Some years ago I read about a church that got into a major quarrel over whether to have a Christmas tree in the church building. One faction contended that Christmas trees were of pagan origin, so to have one in the church would be to yield to a pagan practice. The other group thought that having one was merely a pleasant custom which they had grown up with since childhood, and there was nothing wrong with the practice. That side got a tree, decorated it and set it up in the church basement. When the other faction arrived, they grabbed the tree, lights and all, and dragged it out into the parking lot. The other faction then took the tree and dragged it back into the church. A big fight resulted, right outside the church doors, and somebody had to call the police! The police came, and locked the doors, and all this was spread in the paper the next day.

That is the kind of foolish, silly catastrophe that can result when Christians engage in word battles that carry them much farther than they ever intended to go. Paul says to Timothy, "Remind them of that, and urge them solemnly to conduct themselves as Christians. Plead with them to stop disputings over words."

The second suggestion the apostle makes as to how to handle the incipient quarrel at Ephesus is, demonstrate a proper handling of the Scriptures. Paul says to Timothy, "Show them yourself how to do this." Here is one of those wonderful verses which we all ought to memorize. Verse 15:

Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a workman who has no need to be ashamed, rightly handling the word of truth. {2 Tim 2:15 RSV}

The first thing Paul suggests is, "seek the approval of God, not men." Many a church quarrel is carried on because people are so conscious of what some group within the congregation thinks of them. Many church leaders succumb to that: They join one side or the other because of the pressure of some group upon them. Here the apostle urges Timothy to lift himself above that, to think only of God's approval: "What does God think of what you are saying and what stance you take?" Timothy can tell that by the Word of God and by the presence of the Spirit of God. Does Timothy's attitude reflect a loving, compassionate, understanding heart? That is what is characteristic of the Spirit of God.

Then, Timothy is to work hard at understanding the usage of the words of Scripture; that is what Paul means here. Timothy is to be a workman, a laborer, somebody who needs not be ashamed because he has done his homework adequately; he has investigated throughout the whole of the Scriptures what the words in question mean.

I have found that it takes a minimum of ten to twelve hours to prepare a message for a Sunday morning service. One has to look at how the words in the passage under study are used elsewhere in the Old Testament and the New Testament. Because one is working with languages other than English, one has to go back to the original Greek or Hebrew text and see what the words mean in their original verbiage. Then one has to set the passage in the customs of the first, or earlier, centuries. That takes a lot of work. One of the reasons much of doctrine is misunderstood today is because church leaders, such as Timothy, have not done their homework. Paul urges Timothy to be "a workman who has no need to be ashamed," because he has put in the requisite work at discovering what the words of Scripture really mean.

Last, Timothy is to "rightly handle the word of truth." That has been widely misunderstood in our day. I grew up on the Scofield Reference Bible, which uses the King James text, to "rightly divide the word of truth." I was told that meant that as one read through the New Testament or the Old Testament, one was to divide it up according to which part was addressed to the Jews, which part to the Gentiles, and which part to the Christians; or, one was to divide it according to that which dealt with the church versus that which dealt with the kingdom; whether it addressed itself to those who are under the Law or those who are under grace. That gave rise to what is frequently called, Dispensationalism, where one had to be very careful to understand exactly who God was speaking to when he said something.

There is some value and some truth in that view, but I have had to learn that this text is not talking about dividing the word of truth. The word is more properly translated, "rightly handling the word of truth."

Actually, the word used here is a very interesting one. It is a single word which means "to cut straight" -- "cut straight the word of truth," Paul says. Commentators have struggled as to what Paul is referring to in that metaphor.

Some have thought he meant a plowman, who sets his eye on an object, a tree or a stake, at the end of a field, and he plows a straight course right to that object. According to that view, Paul was suggesting that as Timothy reads the Scriptures he is to get hold of the final truth and not deviate from that; he is to plow a straight course through the word of truth.

Other commentators have thought Paul was referring to the way a stonemason builds a wall: he drops a plumb line, then he is careful to cut the stone so it is straight according to the plumb line.

I think, however, that Paul is probably referring to his own experience as a tentmaker. Timothy traveled with Paul, so he must have worked many nights with him, cutting and sewing material together to make tents. That is what Paul is referring to; a figure that Timothy would well understand.

You ladies who have made garments from patterns know how important it is to cut the material straight. If you cut it on a line away from what the pattern says you will end up with a piece that is either too small or too large. When you try to fit it with other pieces it will either droop and sag because it is too large, or it will pull and pinch because it is too small.

That is what Paul is talking about. When you handle the Scriptures, he says to Timothy, be sure to cut a straight line. That is, understand the words that are used as they relate to other Scriptures that deal with the subject, so that when the whole thing is put together you will not have to pull or stretch or try to fit something in that does not quite belong; you have clearly understood what each section means, and it will all fit together naturally.

Paul is dealing here with a very important principle in understanding the truth of Scripture -- all Scripture must be understood in the light of the rest of Scripture. We really have not ever understood any single passage until we have carefully tried to fit it with all that the Scriptures say about it. One of the most frequent ways in which error begins is when one group takes a single passage, or a single book, of Scripture and zeros in on a single text, or a few chosen texts, and builds its entire doctrine on that one passage.

Some groups take a passage like, "And they all spake with tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance," {cf, Acts 2:4 KJV}. Building on that, they insist that every Christian must speak with tongues in order to be filled with the Spirit. But that is ignoring all the rest that Scripture says about tongues. It is very important that the whole passage be understood and that it fits without difficulty the rest of Scripture.

The third thing the apostle says to Timothy about handling church squabbles is in Verse 16:

Avoid such godless chatter, for it will lead people into more and more ungodliness, and their talk will eat its way like gangrene. {2 Tim 2:16-17a RSV}

The word for *avoid* is really the word, "walk around." Skirt it; do not get involved; do not join the clamor; do not let yourself be down into these kinds of word battles because, if you get involved, it will only escalate the problem. "It will lead to more and more ungodliness," Paul says. The term he uses, which is translated here, *godless chatter*, is literally "empty babblings." That refers to people who shoot off their mouths, who talk off the top of their heads and display a lot of emotionalism. Paul tells Timothy to not get involved with that because it will escalate; it will lead to more and more "unwholesomeness," literally.

Many years ago, a man who briefly attended this congregation became unhappy with us, and went off to join a group which, he said, was more faithful to the Scriptures. That group felt that they were getting special visions and revelations from God. They indulged in prophesyings about individuals within the group, and supposedly received special insights into what other people in the group could do or ought to do. This man was caught up in that whole thing, though we tried to point out the dangers if he persisted in that. The group became more and more involved in specialized healings. They got into matters of tongues and revelations and prophesyings, and then they moved away from this area. Later, I heard that they had gone on into dealing with the occult. Finally, they ended up actually taking a living goat, setting it in their midst, and worshipping it. That is the kind of ungodliness, unwholesomeness, that type of thing can lead to as it escalates and goes on more and more into misunderstanding and confusion.

Further, says the apostle, it will "eat like gangrene." Gangrene is an infection of the bloodstream that not only spreads rapidly through the body, but smells horribly. Foul, suppurating wounds keep increasing in size, so that it is one of the most difficult problems to handle, medically. God's view of a church squabble is that it spreads like gangrene. It smells bad, it spreads quickly, and a whole congregation can be infected by it.

Paul has an example right at hand in Ephesus. Here is a case in point (Verse 17b):

Among them are Hymenaeus and Philetus, who have swerved from the truth by holding that the resurrection is past already. They are upsetting the faith of some. {2 Tim 2:17b-18 RSV}

We met this man Hymenaeus in Paul's first letter to Timothy. Paul says he had, "delivered him unto Satan in order that he may learn not to blaspheme," (1 Tim 1:20 {RSV}). That was several years earlier. But, evidently, it had not done Hymenaeus any good, because he is still spreading his false doctrine throughout the church, teaching that the resurrection was already past.

It is possible to trace how he got into that kind of teaching. Undoubtedly, he took some of Paul's teaching about what happens to a non -- believer when he becomes a Christian, that he is baptized into the death and resurrection of our Lord. In some way we have been made to partake of the death and resurrection of Christ so that we die with him and we are risen again with him in the spirit. Evidently, Hymenaeus taught that is all there is going to be; that spiritual resurrection that you experienced when you were born again is all the resurrection there is going to be. That probably was an accommodation to the Greek philosophy which was prevalent in Ephesus at that time, which said that the body was evil, so it was unthinkable that God would ever be concerned with resurrecting bodies; they were tombs from which we ought to be glad we have escaped.

In teaching that, Hymenaeus was accommodating to the doctrine of the world by taking only partial truth from the revelation of the Scriptures. That is how heresy starts. Hymenaeus ignored the Lord's own words when he predicted that the hour was coming when "all who are in the grave shall hear the voice of the Son of God and shall come forth, some to a resurrection of condemnation and some to a resurrection of redemption," {cf, John 5:28b-29}. The resurrection is not only spiritual, it is also literal. Those teachers in Ephesus were ignoring that, as a result, "they upset the faith of many."

In First Corinthians 15, the Apostle Paul himself tells us that if we lose the resurrection we have lost everything. The whole of Christian truth rests on whether Jesus was actually bodily raised from the dead -- and as a consequence we too will be raised from the dead -- or not. If we lose that, Paul says, our faith is vain and our preaching is vain {cf, 1 Cor 15:17}; we have no hope beyond the grave. Here was a serious deviation from the revelation of the Scripture. It illustrates how error can take form and rapidly spread throughout a congregation.

The last thing the apostle says is, remember God's firm foundation. Verse 19:

But God's firm foundation stands, bearing this seal: "The Lord knows those who are his," and "Let every one who names the name of the Lord depart from iniquity." {2 Tim 2:19 RSV}

In other words, "Timothy, don't panic over this. Yes, there may be heresy in the congregation, there may be dissension among you and you may have to do battle against it, but, remember, 'God's firm foundation stands.'"

That is like a coin with two sides, God's side and man's side.

1. On God's side is, "The Lord knows them that are his." It is remarkable to recognize in the Gospels that Jesus knew that Judas was a traitor from the beginning. The Scriptures tell us that Jesus knew before he chose him that Judas was a devil. He knew those who were his, and those who were not his. Paul reminds us that God's church is never going to be altered, shaken, or diminished, even by the heresies that may rage among us. God knows them that are his.
2. The other side of the coin is that man can know those who are God's when he sees them departing from this kind of iniquity: false doctrine and false teaching among us. We can be confident that those who really are Christians will ultimately see the error that is involved, and leave it. That is where our faith can rest.

Both of those quotations in Verse 19 are taken from the story in the sixteenth chapter of the book of Numbers about the rebellion of Korah, Dathan and Abiram. During Israel's wandering through the wilderness, those three men challenged the authority of Moses, saying, "Why do you listen to Moses? He is no different than we are. We are men of understanding like Moses." Why don't you listen to us, was their implication. Moses took the problem to the Lord, and the Lord said, "Bring them here. Let me give them an examination." Korah, Dathan and Abiram and their families all stood together. Suddenly, before the eyes of the whole congregation, the ground opened up, down they went into the pit and the ground slammed shut behind them. God said, "Any more questions?"

Yes, God knows them that are his. He has his own ways of dealing with this kind of thing. The apostle says that those who are genuine will depart from iniquity. That is the test of a true believer. There is a life in him that will not let him compromise himself with evil and iniquity forever. But there may be a long-term struggle. I have seen that happen, sometimes over a period of years, but God will not let them go on. They must leave the false teaching at last because they cannot live with themselves any longer. Speaking of certain apostates, the Apostle John said, "They went out from us that it might be evident that they were not of us, for if they had been of us they would have continued with us," {cf, 1 Jn 2:19}. That is the mark that will encourage Timothy.

To recapitulate, Paul tells Timothy that the way to handle disputes about words in the congregation is to plead with them for unity.

- First, he says, urge them before the Lord to remember who they are and to stop quarreling;

- Second, labor for accuracy in understanding the Scriptures;
- Third, avoid complicity with this; and,
- Finally, do not panic; God is still in control.

His firm foundation will stand, for God knows those who are his and they will manifest themselves sooner or later by departing from iniquity.

That wonderful word of advice is how God urges us to handle quarrels like that in this 20th century day as well.

Prayer

Heavenly Father, help us to remember that we are to be workmen who need not to be ashamed, rightly handling, cutting a straight path, with the Word of truth; and that we can rest upon the assurance that you know those who are really yours. Thank you for judging among us in this regard. We praise you for the very small degree in which we have had to be concerned with this here at this church. We pray that, whenever anything like this occurs, we may handle it in the wise and wonderful way that Paul outlines. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Title: Avoiding Congregational Gangrene

By: Ray C. Stedman

Series: Studies in Second Timothy

Scripture: 2 Tim 2:14-19

Message No: 5

Catalog No: 3786

Date: March 28, 1982

FIT TO BE USED

by Ray C. Stedman

I want to speak this morning to all who want to be used of God.

I would suspect that deep in every person's heart here there is a desire that God might use him. That is a normal and a proper desire. There is no thrill like the thrill of being used of God. There is nothing that remotely approaches, in terms of excitement, satisfaction and fulfillment, the consciousness that one has been the instrument in the hands of the Almighty to do some of his work -- to change the direction of someone's life, perhaps, to prevent an injury, to resolve an argument, to answer a challenge, to heal a weakness, to rebuke a ruler, or to turn a nation.

I have seen men of high achievement in the world tremble with a sense of awe as they realized that on a given occasion they were the instrument of God's working. I can tell you from personal experience that is something that is without compare in this life. It can happen anywhere, anytime. God works in wonderful ways, not always in very dramatic ways, but in ways we do not anticipate. It can happen to anybody. Being used of God is not confined to pastors, preachers or teachers. Anybody can be an instrument in God's hands.

In the passage we are looking at this morning from Second Timothy, Chapter 2, beginning with Verse 20, the Apostle Paul describes what it takes to be used of God.

In a great house there are not only vessels of gold and silver but also of wood and earthenware, and some for noble use, some for ignoble. If any one purifies himself from what is ignoble, then he will be a vessel for noble use, consecrated and useful to the master of the house, ready for any good work. {2 Tim 2:20-21 RSV}

Most of the commentators take this reference to "a great house" to refer to the whole professing church. They see the church as the house of God, which is the term Paul used for this in his first letter to Timothy. But if we compare what other Scriptures say on this, we discover that Scripture itself forces us to extend this analogy not only to the church, but to the whole world. Every person in the world is a possible vessel for God to use, regardless of what his attitude to God may be.

Scripture reveals that God uses his enemies, even the devil, to accomplish his work. God's sovereignty, his majesty, is such that no matter who we may be or what we may be like, we can be used by him. In the story of the Exodus, in the Old Testament, we learn that not only was Moses the instrument of God but so was Pharaoh. In Romans 9, Paul says that Pharaoh was used of God

to resist the departure from Egypt in order that the greatness of God might be manifest. The apostle says that God raised up Pharaoh, set him on his throne, and used him for his purposes. In fact, in the ninth chapter of Romans, the 21st through the 23rd verses, the apostle uses this very same figure about vessels of mercy contrasted with vessels of wrath. He says, "Has the potter no right over the clay, to make out of the same lump one vessel for beauty and another for menial use?" {Rom 9:21 RSV}. So Scripture itself supports the idea that God can use anybody, believer or nonbeliever.

In Isaiah we are told that Nebuchadnezzar was the servant of God {Jer 27:6}, even though he was a Babylonian pagan. Cyrus the Persian king is called "God's anointed one," {Isa 45:1}. God speaks of him as "my shepherd" {Isa 44:28}, though he too was an unbeliever. If we understand life from the Biblical point of view, we must know that all people can be used of God. So it is not a question of whether you are going to be used of God or not. As this passage points out, the question is, How does God plan to use you? What is he going to do with you? To what purpose is he going to put you in his program? Will it be a noble purpose, or will it be, as this version says, an ignoble? Will it be for good or bad, blessing or judgment? We need to clearly understand this fact.

Recently I saw a sign on someone's desk that said, "It may be that my whole purpose in life is to serve as a warning to others." Everyone needs a bad example as well as a good one. That may be the purpose God will put us to.

The Scriptures do not teach that only the righteous people are used of God. No, God can use anyone. He used Hitler to accomplish certain purposes of judgment and correction. God uses the basest of men; we all are instruments of his work. God used Judas, placing him in the apostolic band. Jesus knew that he would betray him. Judas fulfilled the Scriptures and the predictions of the prophets on that night when he lifted up his heel against the Lord and betrayed him. So God can use anyone.

The great question, however, is to what end, for what purpose is he using you? Here the apostle is pointing out to Timothy that it is for one of two purposes. "In every house," he says, "there are vessels." That is true of all homes -- we have "vessels for honor," i.e., dishes we eat from, pots and pans we cook in, decorated vases, etc., are all vessels unto honor. They are not only useful but they are preserved, they are permanent, we want to keep them. But every house also has "vessels for dishonor" -- we have garbage cans, slop buckets, bedpans, trash barrels, wastebaskets, etc. We do not display them. They are useful, but they are not presentable. We may even intend to dispose of them, sometimes after only one use. Those are vessels of dishonor.

That is the way God sees humanity. If we want to understand life as it really is, we have to look at humanity in that way. God sees all of us as useful vessels, but some only for good purposes; others must be used to accomplish wicked things, judgmental things, hurtful things to others, because of the evil in human society.

At this point someone is sure to raise the question Paul raises in Romans 9, where, in dealing with this subject, he says, "You will say to me then, 'Then why does he yet find fault?'" {cf, Rom 9:19 RSV}. That is, if God uses everybody to serve his purposes, why does he then turn around and blame people for doing what he himself used them to accomplish?

Many nonbelievers will raise that question about the sovereign justice of God. Paul answers that in Romans 9. I am not going to deal with it fully this morning, except to point out that in this passage in Second Timothy it is clear that the analogy between a house and vessels breaks down when it is applied to human beings. In our homes pots and pans have no choice as to what they are going to be used for -- that is entirely up to the householder -- but in Scripture it is very clear that, when this is applied to human beings, a choice is involved. We see that in Verse 21: "If any one purifies himself from what is ignoble, then he will be a vessel for noble use." We have no choice of whether we are going to be used of God or not; the choice we have is what God is going to use us for. That is up to us; it is put in our hands. I grant you we are not dealing with the whole question of the sovereignty of God here. Paul is not dealing with the way God brings about his purposes in man, but he is facing us with a clear responsibility to make a choice in the question of how God is going to use us, whether it will be for a good purpose or not.

Choice determines the way God uses us. "If a man purifies himself" -- that means man has something to do with it; he has to purify himself. God will never set man's will aside and use him for a good purpose without his being willing to be used. One of the most remarkable things about the Scriptures is how they preserve for us what we regard as our highest dignity, which is the right to exercise our own will. God does not force us to be used of him; it must always be a willing choice on our part. But we have to do something about it. He does not use us, willy-nilly, against our wills, for good things. He will do that for evil, for ignoble purposes, but not for good; there the choice is up to us.

When it says, "he must purify himself," that does not mean that we have the power to deal with our own sins, to cleanse our own lives. We do not have that power. But it does mean that we are responsible to use the cleansing that has been provided. If you have been working on your car or in the yard and your hands are dirty, you go into the bathroom to clean yourself up with soap and water -- you deliberately choose to use the soap and water provided -- when you have done so you say, "I've cleansed myself." It was not you that did the cleansing (it was the soap and water), but you used that which was provided.

That is what this is teaching us. We have a responsibility to use the redemption that has been provided in Jesus Christ, to lay hold of his provision for the forgiveness of sin. Scripture tells us our sins are not forgiven unless we are willing to confess them:

"If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness," (1 Jn 1:9 {KJV}). You can go into a bathroom with dirty hands and there is soap and water there, but if you refuse to use them you will come out just as dirty as you went in. You cannot blame the bathroom for that. You are to blame.

You can come to church and hear the truth of the Word of God, but if you do not apply it to yourself it does you no good. You cannot blame God because he did not give you all the good things he promises to those who come to him, if you have not come to him. Even as a Christian you cannot expect to have active in your life the tremendous provisions that God promises; you cannot expect to be used of God in beautiful and wonderful ways unless you are willing to purify yourself and use the instruments he has provided.

Notice that not only is the choice up to you, but, according to this verse, the separation from evil, the cleansing, precedes the consecration. It is never the other way around. Everybody wants to be used of God if he is a Christian at all, but you cannot be used of God for good purposes unless you are willing to say "No" first. That is the point this makes. You must say "No" to the wrong before God will say "Yes" to the right. In other words, you have to reject the philosophy of those who are urging you to live for yourself. You have to refuse the blandishments they offer you to be part of the crowd. You have to restrict their companionship. You may even have to cut off your friendships to a considerable degree -- not that the Christian must ever retire from the world, but we have to recognize that there must be a turning away from that which is ignoble. That is what Paul says to Timothy. You cannot go on living like you have always done and expect God to use you. He cannot, he will not, until there is a cleansing.

Now notice the result: "If any one purifies himself ... he will be," Paul says, "a vessel unto honor, consecrated and useful, ready for any good work." He will be "consecrated." That is a word that has a permanence about it: One is permanently set aside in God's mind for useful purposes, for thrilling, exciting, adventurous discoveries of being used by God. Furthermore, he is useful, profitable, and effective. God uses him in ways that accomplish something.

Finally, he is "ready for any good work." He becomes adaptable; God can use him in many different ways. Life becomes a tremendous adventure as you discover the innovative ways in which God can use you. All this hangs on your willingness to turn away from the wrongful attitudes, philosophies and actions of life.

This is the proper interpretation, and it is proved by the way Paul specifically applies this to Timothy.

In Verse 22 he says,

So shun youthful passions ... {2 Tim 2:22a RSV}

This is the way you turn away from wrong things: "Shun youthful passions." The word is *flee*, run away, get away from them.

Everybody who reads this immediately thinks of strong sexual urges. That is what the words "youthful passions" raise in our minds. It does include that. Youth is the time when sexual drives are the strongest. In a sex-oriented society like ours, these passions can become very powerful, very compelling, driving us, occupying our minds, touching almost everything we do. We oftentimes find ourselves in the grip of tremendous forces that urge us on to do things that the world is telling us are perfectly all right; no harmful results will ensue, we are told. Yet these are things which Scripture tells us are wrong, hurtful, destructive and evil in the sight of God. So this verse does include that.

Perhaps Timothy was troubled that way, although I doubt that is really what the apostle has in mind. By this time, Timothy was in his early or mid-thirties. He had traveled with Paul for sixteen years or more, and he had a great deal of experience in learning how to handle the sexual drives within him. No, in this context the apostle is referring to something more than sex.

Dr. Charles Erdman has captured it in his commentary. He says:

We may conclude from what precedes and what follows that he refers not so much to bodily appetites as to the temptations of a young pastor to pride, to conceit, to dogmatism, to contentiousness and to the display of his own wisdom, either in exploiting false theories or in defending the faith.

In other words, "Timothy, cool down, shut up, and back off." That is what this is talking about.

The congregation at Ephesus was about to erupt with controversy. False teachers were spreading lies there and some people were ready to follow them. Timothy was tempted to come on strong, to blast away and be dogmatic and assertive and turn this into an argument. Paul is warning about that.

It is not wrong for Timothy to defend the faith and stand up for the truth of Scripture. Paul has urged him to do that before, and he himself is a model of that kind of defense of the truth. But what he warns against is the pride that takes a position, refuses to

listen to anyone else, and assertively concludes that everyone else must be wholly in the wrong if they disagree. Pride keeps pressing and getting involved in shouting matches. Timothy has to say "No" to the philosophy that was as prevalent in that day as it is in ours, which says, "Stand up for your rights. Claim all your privileges. Get your share of the glory." Timothy is to purify himself from that which is ignoble in order that he might be put to noble use.

That is the first step. You never start with wanting to be used of God; you have to start with refusing to be used by the wrong. If you want God to make you an effective instrument of his working in this world throughout your life, that is where you have to start. You have to say "No" to those assertive, dogmatic, prideful, conceited positions that are exploited all around us today -- and which are often applauded by Christian groups -- if you want God to use you.

Then, once you have done that, the positive is possible. Paul says,

Aim at righteousness, faith, love, and peace, {2 Tim 2:22b RSV}

The word is *pursue* it, go after it, go for it. What is wonderful about those four things is that every one of them is presented in the Scriptures as a gift from God. Only God can give us those things. But what is interesting is that, though God wants to give them, you will not get them unless you pursue them. You have to claim them; you have to go after them. You have to assert yourself along these lines. Receiving those things must be the result of your deliberate choice that you do the things that make for righteousness, faith, love and peace.

Righteousness means right behavior. There are times when every Christian is called upon to choose between what he knows to be wrong and what he knows to be right. You have to say "No" to what is wrong, and "Yes" to what is right. If you have not learned to say "No," if you drift along with whatever the crowd is doing, you will never be an instrument used by God for noble purposes. You have to say "No" to unbelief and "Yes" to faith.

I know a lot of people who struggle with little faith, the reason oftentimes being because they have never sought those things that awaken faith. The Scriptures tell us that "faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God," {cf, Rom 10:17 KJV}. The more you are aware of what God says the more your faith is aroused, awakened and stirred up to lay hold of what God says. Those who never have time for the Scriptures, who never read the Word of God, who never listen to it unfolded for them and are never stirred up to lay hold of what God wants to give them will never have it forced upon them. God is not going to drop it on them until they are ready to lay hold of it, to ask for it, to seek it.

We must deliberately choose love. We often are exposed to the choice of how we are going to react toward someone who, perhaps, has irritated us, who has done something that makes us upset or angry. Our flesh tells us, "Tell him off. Hit back. Get even. Let him know how you feel. Make him squirm." But, if you want to be used of God, you cannot give way to that. You have to say "No" to that. Instead, you deliberately give a soft answer that will turn away wrath, or apologize for having given offense, for, even though your stance was right, you said it in a way that was wrong. Or you must reach out and see him not as your rival, someone who is trying to take something away from you, but as one who is feeling upset and troubled himself, and in need of help and encouragement. So love reaches out.

You have to deliberately seek for peace. Sometimes you must initiate reconciliation. If somebody is angry at you, although you are not to blame, you just cannot keep that within you and let it fester away, upsetting you and creating frustration in your heart. According to the Scriptures, you have to go to that person and let him know what the trouble is. Initiate a reconciliation. Sit down with him and say, "I don't know what has happened, but something has come between us. It's not right and I don't like it, so let's sit down and talk it out. Tell me how you feel and what it is that is troubling you." Seek peace. Aim at it. Pursue it. That is what the apostle says.

And third, surround yourselves with those who encourage you along this line.

[Seek] peace, along with those who call upon the Lord from a pure heart. {2 Tim 2:22c RSV}

Those with pure hearts are not sinless saints; they are not holy Joes who have never done anything wrong; they are not the kind of people who look down their noses at everyone else who gets into trouble. No, the word is not "pure," but "cleansed," past tense; those with a cleansed heart; those who have already known what it is to be where you are. They do not put you down, they encourage you. They say, "I know how you feel. I've been there too, but God picked me up. I know what it means to lay hold of his great, forgiving love." So one of the necessities of being used of God is that you keep company with those who are aiming in the same direction.

On Tuesday last, Steve Zeisler and I spent the day at Vacaville Penitentiary. I had not been up there before. It was a most remarkable experience to see our Christian friends from there working in that prison as salt in the midst of a corrupt society. It was a rainy day and no one was out in the yard. Everyone was in the halls, so it was like going into a high school that had just been let out for lunch. In the midst of that overcrowded prison, a Christian group is maintaining a testimony which is keeping

that prison away from violence, acting as salt to preserve it in the midst of a very explosive situation.

In the chapel, I sat right next to a man who had been a murderer -- a murderer several times. He had been one of the toughest, fiercest convicts in the prison system. He had stabbed several people while he was in prison, and he was a member of the gang that tried to rule the prison, a vicious loner who would not hesitate to take a human life. Yet God had reached him. Now he is the most gentle-spirited, gracious fellow, a teacher of the other prisoners, instructing them in the truth of God.

I met with others who had been rapists, murderers and child abusers, men whose lives were changed, who were now listening to, and rejoicing in, the Scriptures.

I asked Herb Sokol, the leader of the group, what it was that most disappointed him in his work. Without hesitating he said, "It is those who are so dramatically changed here, but who lose all they have gained when they get out. I asked why that happened. "Because they go back to the same old crowd," he said.

We are not made to live all alone. We are made to live with others; we need the support of others. Those who surround themselves with a non-Christian view of life and with friends who still remain that way are almost certain to go back at last into that way of thinking and that way of living. So if we want to be used of God, the apostle urges us to seek the companionship of those of like mind. This does not mean that we are to avoid contact with non-Christians, to have nothing to do with those who are not of the same faith as ourselves; that is another mistake, another extreme. But it is equally bad if we do not seek out the fellowship of those of like mind with ourselves. Here the apostle is dealing practically with how you can be an instrument in God's hands to vitally and mightily affect the world around you.

I want to close with this quotation from John Stott in his book on Second Timothy. He says:

This double duty of Christians -- negative and positive -- is the consistent, reiterated teaching of Scripture. Thus, we are to deny ourselves and to follow Christ. We are to put off what belongs to our old life and to put on what belongs to our new life. We are to put to death our earthly members and to set our minds on heavenly things. We are to crucify the flesh and to walk in the Spirit. It is the ruthless rejection of the one, in combination with the relentless pursuit of the other, which Scripture enjoins upon us as the secret of holiness. [Holiness is wholeness; being what we were intended to be -- useful instruments in God's hands.] Only so can we hope to be fit for the Master's use. If the promise is to be inherited ('he will be a vessel for noble use'), the condition must be fulfilled ('if anyone purifies himself from what is ignoble').

That is a very practical admonition from the Apostle Paul. Timothy had a great opportunity in Ephesus. The church there was under tremendous pressure. The whole world was about to explode in flames, and Timothy was himself under great pressure to conform, to go along and not say anything. Paul advises him, "Timothy, if you want to be an instrument of God, if you want to be used of God in that situation, begin by saying "No" to all the wrong things in your life, and then say "Yes" to the things God wants to do with you. He will then pick you up and use you in ways you would never dream of."

We do not have to plan how God is going to use us. All we have to do is be usable by means of this process.

I hope this will help us as we face the possibilities and the challenge of our world today.

Prayer

Lord, we wait upon you now. We know we live in a day like Timothy did, a day of tremendous pressure, a day of great possibility. Many of us are under pressure ourselves, facing choices we need to make. Grant us now in this hour the strength to say "No" to the things we must, and to say "Yes" to the things that we should, that you may find us usable in your hand, a vessel fit for the Master's use. We pray in his name, Amen.

Title: Fit to be Used
By: Ray C. Stedman
Series: Studies in Second Timothy
Scripture: 2 Tim 2:20-22
Message No: 6
Catalog No: 3787
Date: April 4, 1982

by Ray C. Stedman

When the Apostle Paul wrote his second letter to Timothy from his dungeon in Rome, he realized that Timothy was living in a world that was about to explode in conflict -- a world that was very much like the one we live in today. Timothy had another problem too: he was teaching a church which was threatening to split apart and divide into factions over arguments and divisions which were separating believers. So, in this letter, the apostle tells how to handle both of these problems -- how to live in a world that is threatened with conflict, and how to live in a church that is threatened with controversy.

In the section which we have before us today the apostle is dealing with the matter of controversies, church fights, incipient splits, times when the congregation is divided over some issue. Paul here tells us what kind of controversies should and should not be allowed, and how Christians should conduct themselves in the midst of them.

Paul puts it very plainly. Second Timothy 2:23:

Have nothing to do with stupid, senseless controversies; you know that they breed quarrels. And the Lord's servant must not be quarrelsome but kindly to every one, an apt teacher, forbearing, correcting his opponents with gentleness. {2 Tim 2:23-25a RSV}

Some have read that passage as though it said, "Never get involved with any kind of controversy. Don't ever take up sides or press any issue to the point that it creates argument. Stay away from it." But that is not what it says at all. In fact, if you read it that way it often results in what many churches do today, which is to take issues that need to be debated and sweep them under the rug. They cover them over and pretend they do not exist; they try to maintain a facade of outward peace, while division and dissent seethe and ferment underneath until it explodes in the breakup of a congregation.

That is not what the apostle is saying at all. In fact, in other places he has said very clearly that there must be controversies in churches. Look at First Corinthians 11:19: "There must indeed be controversies [*heresies* is the word] among you in order that those who are approved might be made manifest," {1 Cor 11:19 KJV}. In other words, how are you going to tell who is mature enough to handle a controversial matter unless you have a controversy to work on? So there must be heresies, differences of viewpoint, among you, Paul says.

We can be very grateful indeed to the great controversies of the past in the church which have served to clarify truth. The great Lutheran hymn, "A Mighty Fortress Is Our God," resulted from the controversy that raged around Martin Luther over the doctrine of justification by faith. The church has never forgotten that controversy which cleared the air on what was a very important doctrinal matter.

But what the apostle is saying to Timothy is that there are certain kinds of controversies he must never get involved in. "Have nothing to do with them," Paul says. There are two kinds particularly -- stupid controversies, and senseless controversies.

The word that is translated "stupid" here is the word *moros*, from which we get our word, *moron*. Paul is talking about moronic controversies, foolish, trivial matters which, even when they are settled after long and loud debate, do nothing for you; they do not advance the Christian cause in the least degree. Such trivial matters may be interesting in some limited way, but they should never be allowed to become controversies and have people divide over them.

In the Middle Ages we know that the scholars of the church debated at great length issues like how many angels can stand on the head of a pin. That is a foolish question. Angels are spirits, and as such do not occupy space. The head of a pin is the same as the top of a mountain to angels.

But we have our own ridiculous questions today. I have heard people debate heatedly and at great length what prominent world figure in this day has a name which can be reduced numerically to the numbers 666. One can buy a lot of books today -- very inexpensively -- suggesting names that have been advanced in the past of people who are no longer with us. The last person I saw mentioned in this regard was Anwar Sadat. He, however, was assassinated a few weeks later so he has been removed from the running on that.

Take a question such as I have heard hotly debated, "Was Jesus crucified on Wednesday, Thursday or Friday?" That question does have some degree of historical interest -- there is evidence for a day other than the traditional Friday -- so perhaps that issue merits an hour or so of discussion or study. But what difference does it make even if it is settled? To divide up and separate from other believers because of that is ridiculous, yet there are people who do that.

Another example is the debate going on today about whether the Shroud of Turin is the burial robe of Jesus or not. Again, this is an interesting question. It has some significance and it merits some discussion. I have read most of the articles I have run across on it. But it does not merit controversy or argument or heated debate, because even if it proves to be the genuine burial robe of

Jesus, how has that advanced us? How are we profited by that? The most it can be is a slight additional evidence of the historicity of the Biblical story, yet for centuries that has been well established so it does not help us much.

You can probably think of a dozen more debates on trivial matters like this that get nowhere. Those are what Paul calls foolish, moronic debates. Have nothing to do with them.

Then the second word is translated "senseless." This word really means unlearned, arising out of ignorance. As such it refers to questions that are basically insoluble; we do not know enough to answer the questions that are being asked. Take, for example, the mode of baptism in the early church. Many people have angrily debated that. They are sure they are right and can prove that the early Christians immersed people. But another crowd says, "No, they sprinkled them," or "poured water over them." That has been hotly debated, even to the point of trying to determine whether they put them face down forward, or three times backward, whatever.

I am of the persuasion that you cannot prove from the Greek text of the New Testament what was the mode of baptism employed, although you can do so from various versions because they are translated with a bias. But when you get back to the original language there is no way of knowing. I think that is deliberate, because it is not important. We put too much stress on symbols and on carrying through a certain ritual, meanwhile forgetting the great reality behind it which God wants us to know. So debating over that is a futile thing.

I remember when I first came to Palo Alto there were a number of Christians in this country, especially in this area, who were very hotly debating the question, "Could Jesus have sinned? When Jesus became a man, did he so much become a man that, like us, he was not only tempted but he could have sinned?" Almost every Christian agrees with the Biblical statement that Jesus did not sin. He himself challenged the Pharisees of his day, saying to them, "Who of you convinces me of sin?" {cf, John 8:46a KJV}. But the question that was raised was, "Could he have?" That is a hypothetical matter. We do not know enough, Scripture does not tell us enough to answer that. We can speculate all we want to, but that does not give us answers. To debate over that, to argue over it, to get angry about it and call people heretics over a matter like that is absolutely foolish. That is what the apostle calls a "senseless" debate.

The question of the reconciliation of the free will of man and the sovereignty of God -- though that is a subject that merits a great deal of discussion and deep, theological thinking -- nevertheless, ultimately falls in that category. We do not have enough information to settle it. We can believe both are true, but we cannot finally decide once and for all.

This whole matter of whether the gift of tongues is for today or not also falls into this category. This is a debate that cannot ultimately be settled, it seems, because it is always with us. Just last week I met with a group of people from this church who debated this question all evening. Some were pro, some were con, but the discussion was kept at a very high level. It never degenerated to putting people down, calling them heretics or wiping them out. It was a beautiful evening spent in a very profitable discussion that clarified the issues in many ways, though it did not convince some. That is proper. There is nothing wrong with that. There must indeed be differences of viewpoint among us and they are proper to debate, but to get angry and upset and divide is what is wrong. That is what Paul is talking about here.

So we can put it in a nutshell:

- Discussion, yes;
- Controversy, no.

Stupid, senseless controversies breed quarrels, Paul says. When you start pushing your viewpoint to the degree that you wipe out others, when you put people down and treat them with something less than respect, you breed quarrels and divisions in the body of Christ.

What about proper controversies then, the kind we should discuss? What about attacks on vital doctrines, questions on the proper Christian response to the burning social issues of our day? How should we handle such important issues that people feel so strongly about they feel they cannot surrender lest they give up something vital and important? The apostle has some very clear guidelines for us. He gives us five things, one negative and four positives.

The first one is the negative: "The Lord's servant must not be quarrelsome." The servant of the Lord is any Christian, but especially Christian leaders like Timothy. The Lord's servant must not be an argumentative, pejorative, belligerent type of person who is ready to come out with guns blazing. There are many people like that who shoot from the lip, always ready for an argument. But the Lord's servant is not out to win arguments; he is not out to squash the opposition or silence dissent by overbearing, heavy-handed approaches. Rather, he is there to encourage discussion and examination. He does not put down opponents or resort to name-calling or diatribe. He is not argumentative, not contentious.

Charles Spurgeon spoke about those in his day who, he said, "... went about with theological revolvers in their ecclesiastical

trousers." The Lord's servant does not do that.

What then is the Lord's servant to be?

First, he is to be "kindly to every one." No matter if it is a cultist he is debating, or someone who is very upset about an issue, somebody with an ax to grind, some difficult person who is obviously out to cause trouble and create dissension, the Lord's servant is to be kindly to everyone, the apostle says. Actually, that phrase is translated from one single word in the Greek which appears only in this place in the New Testament. It is a word which means "gentle." A better English translation, perhaps, would be, *approachable*. He is someone who is approachable.

When I was at Dallas Seminary, I had a Bible teacher there who was a godly, gifted man. I had great respect for his Bible knowledge, but when I went to see him once to ask him a Bible question, he was so cold, stern, and harsh with me that I never asked him another question. I listened to him teach, but I never went to him again. That is the opposite of being approachable, open to discussion with anyone.

Second, the Lord's servant is to be "an apt teacher," i.e., skillfully dealing with the facts involved, not with feelings, not with fantasies, but with the facts of Scripture. There is where we must always return. It is so easy for an argument to slide off the facts and onto feelings, experiences, and reactions to things. The Lord's servant must call people back to facts.

Paul Winslow and I were discussing a matter at a staff meeting the other day. I brought up something that he took issue to, very kindly and gently, but he brought out some facts. I said to him, "You know the trouble with you, Paul, is that you don't know how to argue. You just deal with facts, but you can't get a good argument going with facts!" We laughed about that, but that is the point -- the servant of the Lord must be an apt teacher.

Then third, he must be "forbearing." That is a great word. It means he must keep his cool, be unruffled and not respond in kind to what people are handing him. That is not easy to do.

When somebody attacks me personally in a debate, I want to attack back. I want to start with his remote ancestry and point out to him what is wrong with that, then bring it right down to the present, and show him how fouled up he is, and, furthermore, how much worse he is going to get as he proceeds into the future!

But that is not what a servant of the Lord is to do. He is to recognize that when he is reviled, if he reviles in return, he has departed from the example of his Lord, who, "When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; ... but he trusted to him who judges justly," (1 Pet 2:23 {RSV}).

What that is saying is you cannot keep your cool by merely deciding not to get angry. Will power alone will not handle this kind of pressure. I have tried it. I have determined not to get upset in a certain controversy and found that as the pressure mounted and I was attacked personally I could not keep my promise to myself and I would strike back. No, it is not will power alone, it is dependence on Divine aid. It is an inward reliance on God, a calling on God to help you at that point, to recognize your weakness and help you to stand and not respond in kind. That is what forbearance refers to.

The fourth thing the apostle says sums up in a kind of a harmony of action all of the above. He says, "correcting his opponents with gentleness." Here the word gentleness is really the word *mEEK*. And meekness is not weakness. We often think of it that way -- a kind of a chinless, Casper Milquetoast type of response where one remains meek and quiet. That is not the idea. Meekness in Scripture is selflessness. Meekness is not letting yourself get involved; it is not taking things personally, in other words.

The King James Version has a very good translation here. It says, instructing "those who oppose themselves." That shows what error does to us. When we get stubborn, when we are sure we are right, when we insist on our own point of view, and get personal, etc., what we are doing is opposing ourselves. We stand in our own way, we become our own worst enemy, and we create our own problems. That is the revelation of this. Until we change ourselves, we will never solve the controversy.

The thing we all know, but so easily forget, is that the only person we can change in a controversy is ourselves. You cannot change other people. You can force their behavior to be different, but you do not change them inside.

We all know about the little boy whose mother tried to get him to sit down and forced him to do so, but he said, "I may be sitting down outside, but I'm standing up inside."

"A man convinced against his will is of the same opinion still." And a woman -- well, she is almost as bad as a man.

No, you only can change yourself. We do not think we are contributing anything to the problem, but we always are. When an argument exists, and especially when it gets heated, angry, and personal, then we are definitely contributing to it and we are

opposing ourselves; we are standing in our own way to the blessing God wants to bring.

If you are dealing with that, it requires what Paul here calls *correcting*. That is a word that means "child-training" -- you deal with it like a child. We have three young grandsons living with us now. Two of them have bikes which they leave right in front of the steps to the house. I have tried to tell them that is not the place to leave them because some of us older and slower people fall over them. It occurred to me the other day, after the umpteenth time that the bikes had been left there, that I had never told them where to put them. I had only said, "Don't leave them there." So I took one of my grandsons and showed him where to put the bike, telling him it was just as easy to put it there, it will not get in anybody's way, everybody will be happy with you, etc. He looked up at me and smiled. I could see that it meant a lot to him just to have me take the time to show him another way to handle the problem. That is the word that is employed here: "Instructing those who oppose themselves." Paul is talking about training them and showing them another way to handle the problem.

That brings us to the last and, in many ways, the most important thing of all. Paul concludes with these words:

God may perhaps grant that they will repent and come to know the truth, and they may escape from the snare of the devil, after being captured by him to do his will. {2 Tim 2:25b-26 RSV}

In dealing with controversy, the one thing the servant of the Lord must remember is the Divine possibilities that are always present. He must understand that, if he conducts himself as Paul has outlined here, there is a very real possibility that it will trigger a Divine process of three steps:

The first step is, God will grant the person repentance. It is very remarkable that repentance is not something the person concerned does, it is something God enables him to do. Repentance does not mean to feel sorry; it means to change your attitude, change your heart, take a different view, a different stance on the matter. That is a gift of God. We do not run our lives. Nobody does. We think we do, but we are always either being influenced by the devil and his angels -- master psychologists that they are, able to twist our thinking and influence us in ways we are not aware -- or we are being led and influenced by the Spirit of God who is enabling us to do things that we could not otherwise do. So what we can do is remember that God may grant them repentance.

The words may perhaps mean God sometimes has purposes in mind that we do not know. All we are seeing is the immediate struggle, the immediate problem, and we would love to see it resolved. We think that that is the main purpose God has in mind as well, but not always. He is, of course, concerned about peace. He is the great Mediator. The Lord Jesus is the One who brings peace, who breaks down middle walls of partition that separate people. But sometimes he is accomplishing something else besides, and he delays the repentance, or he is working out another purpose that we cannot see. So we cannot always count on the fact that our efforts at ending controversy are going to succeed. It may be that God will not grant repentance for his own reasons.

But if he does, then the second step is clear: "They come to know the truth," Paul says. The way you can tell that repentance has been granted is that they agree with the Scripture. They accept it, they know it to be true, and though it may involve painful adjustments on their part, they are committed to it, they follow it.

The third step is, "and they may escape the snare of the devil." The devil's traps are always designed to destroy, to wreck, to ruin, to hurt, to harm, to leave people shells, full of meaningless actions that go nowhere; to take away joy and peace and love and delight. The devil does this by trapping people in ways that confuse and deceive them.

I had a very vivid example of a situation like that just this week. A young man drove five and a half hours to see me in order to talk with me about a marital problem. He and his wife are Christians, and have been married for a dozen years, but of late he had fallen in love with another woman -- a familiar story in our time. He told me that he had never really felt any sense of affection for his wife, but this woman met his needs, she turned him on, and made him feel fulfilled and satisfied. Yet his conscience bothered him because he knew it was not right. He was being terribly tormented. His business was failing, his own life was rendered miserable; he could not sleep as he was torn by these conflicting desires which he vividly explained to me. He said he had had a dream that the Lord had come and put his hand of blessing upon this union with the other woman, and said that it was the right way to go.

The man had come to me hoping that I would help resolve the conflict, and help him find a way by which he could rightly divorce his wife and marry the other woman. I did not condemn him. I understand those feelings. I did not put him down or in any way ridicule him or make him feel like he was a pariah. I explained to him what was happening. I pointed out, as gently as I could, that no matter how delightful that other experience was, no matter how much it seemed he was being fulfilled in a way he had never been before, how it appeared to offer hope for enjoyment and blessing in his life that his marriage never had, despite all that, as God looked at the situation it fell under the description of a very ugly word. I did not even have to tell him what it was. He supplied it. "I know," he said, "It's adultery, isn't it?" That is what it was, adultery.

There are some things said about adultery, what it does to us, how it destroys, how it demeans, and tears us apart, and destroys our

humanity, and we looked at those. I read to him some pages out of John White's wonderful book, *Eros Defiled*. Then we talked about what was happening in his own personal life as a result. As we talked, I could see that God had granted him repentance because, despite his feelings, he looked at me and said, "I know you're right."

Then we talked about what it would mean to go home, and give up this other woman. It would be rather like the feeling of passing through death, as though one has lost a loved one. But many people have to do that when loved ones are taken home, yet God enables a recovery to come in, and, sooner or later, they go through a process which leads at last to peace and quietness. Then this man could re-approach his marriage with a whole new look at what marriage was, and learn from this. God takes us through circumstances like this sometimes to show us what we have not been doing about our marriages, what we can do, and what the possibilities are.

When we had finished he thanked me for having been faithful to him with the Word of truth. He went away resolving that he would pass through the death of giving up the other woman so that he might fulfill the will of God, and thus escape the snare of the devil. Had he gone on, and tried to work this out on the terms he had in mind when he first came to me, inevitably he would have ended up not getting what he wanted and having to pay all the bills along the way. That is what always happens when we run from God, and have destroyed another person's hopes, dreams and happiness, which we have sworn to uphold. That is what adultery does.

When we are faithful, when we conduct ourselves as Paul describes here, we trigger a Divine process that can result in release, even though that may take us through a form of death. But if we come on argumentatively, angry, and contentious, we make that process highly unlikely to occur. That is the thrust that Paul leaves us with.

May God help us to be faithful to the Scripture, yet in such a way that we are aware of the pain and the hurt that another person can be involved in. Having been involved in it ourselves to one degree or another, we understand that it is only through death that life comes.

As Jesus put it, "Unless the grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it abides alone [loneliness, emptiness, meaninglessness], but if it dies it brings forth much fruit," {cf, John 12:24}.

That is where the Apostle Paul would lead us as well.

Prayer

Lord, teach us to walk according to the truth of the Word, this wonderful Book of reality that shows us life the way it really is and enables us to see through the deceitful snares of the devil, these alluring circumstances that seem to offer so much and deliver so little. Lord, forgive us and strengthen us to walk by faith and by the Spirit in the love and grace that you provide. We pray in Jesus' name, Amen.

Title: Guidelines for Controversies
By: Ray C. Stedman
Series: Studies in Second Timothy
Scripture: 2 Tim 2:23-26
Message No: 7
Catalog No: 3788
Date: May 2, 1982

DANGEROUS TIMES

by Ray C. Stedman

There was a full-page advertisement in the Los Angeles Times last week that heralded in large black print, "Christ Is Already Here." The ad went on to say that Christ is now in some secret place on the earth, and that within two months a worldwide announcement as to where he is will be made over television and radio. Not only that, but this Christ will also be revealed as Buddha and several other major religious leaders of the past.

I do not know who placed that ad. I do know that a full-page ad in the Los Angeles times costs tens of thousands of dollars; and, according to the advertisement, a similar ad was to appear in major newspapers all over the world. Somebody is either attempting to perpetrate a gigantic fraud, or else to arouse interest in some religious announcement that may perhaps launch a new cult.

These kinds of things which are appearing frequently in our day arouse the expectation in many peoples' hearts that perhaps we are

right at the edge of the promised return of our Lord to earth, that these days in which we live are the last days. The nuclear threat that hangs over us, the constant advance of the great superpowers of earth toward a headlong clash, make many people feel that we are indeed in the last days before the great tribulation breaks in terrible fury upon the earth. So people today are asking with great sincerity, "Are these indeed the last days?"

The passage to which we have come in Second Timothy is one that many have taken to refer to the last days before the coming of our Lord. Writing to Timothy in Ephesus, the Apostle Paul says:

But understand this, that in the last days there will come times of stress. For men will be lovers of self, lovers of money, proud, arrogant, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, inhuman, implacable, slanderers, profligates, fierce, haters of good, treacherous, reckless, swollen with conceit, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God. {2 Tim 3:1-4 RSV}

That reads like a summary of the six o'clock news, doesn't it? I remember reading that in grade school when I was just a boy -- which is not exactly what you would call recent. When I read it, I was filled with fear and trepidation, even that long ago. I was confident that it was being fulfilled in that very day, 50 years ago. The Great Depression was beginning; there was a great deal of trouble and strife in the United States. Fear had settled upon the nations of the world. Already the looming shadow of World War II was gathering on the horizon of life. Many were feeling that those were the last days, when we could expect the return of Christ.

So when I read that, even as a boy, I was aware that this passage was taken by many to predict the last days of the church. But I was unaware that many similar times had come into human history during the course of the 2,000 years since the first appearing of our Lord. Many people take the phrase, "these last days," to refer to the time just before Christ's return, but the biblical usage of that phrase indicates that it refers to the whole period of time between the first coming of our Lord and his second coming. In other words, for 2,000 years we have been living in the last days.

In the account in Acts 2, we read that, on the Day of Pentecost, Peter quoted the prophecy of Joel, in which the prophet said that "in the last days" God would pour out his Spirit upon all flesh, {cf, Acts 2:17}. That, Peter said, was beginning to be fulfilled on the Day of Pentecost, almost 2,000 years ago. The first words of the book of Hebrews are: "In many and various ways God spoke of old to our fathers by the prophets; but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son," {Heb 1:1-2a RSV}. So it is clear, from that, that "the last days" is a period which has now grown to 2,000 years' duration. The Apostle Paul is saying that within this extended period of time there will come repetitive cycles of distress, times of stress, perilous times, when all the conditions which he describes with these chilling words will obtain.

As we look back through human history during these last 2,000 years we can see how true that is. Again and again in our Western world we have had periods of relative peace and prosperity, only to have them interrupted by these terrible times of stress and agony that repeatedly come into human affairs. So these words are not necessarily a prediction of the last days for the church, rather, they are a recognition of the cycle of days like this that will keep coming. And, of course, one of them is going to be the last one.

Whether we are living in those times or not is difficult to say. Perhaps we are. Surely these times of stress we live in exactly fit the description the apostle uses here. But whether the actual last cycle to come into history before our Lord returns is difficult to say. As in the past, the clouds of peril may disperse and the sun may break out again. Some degree of peace and prosperity may return again to the world.

But what the apostle wanted Timothy -- and us -- to know, he clearly outlines: "Understand this," he says, "that these will be dangerous times, times of great stress, times when our faith will be pushed to the limit of its endurance, when we will be under attack and under threat." Furthermore, Paul reveals a rather startling thing, these times of stress will be characterized by and caused by two major factors, which he goes on to describe.

The first factor is very startling indeed. The striking thing about this paragraph is not what I read in Verses 1-4, but what is in Verse 5:

... holding the form of religion but denying the power of it. Avoid such people. {2 Tim 3:5 RSV}

In other words, Paul says that the primary cause of these repetitive cycles of stress and danger is the hypocritical lives of Christians who outwardly look pious, religious, committed and devoted, but are actually unchanged inside and have no power to overcome evil in their lives. Hypocritical Christianity -- that is the bottom line in these times of stress.

I do not think any of us really grasps the revelation of Scripture about the nature of the church. The New Testament everywhere

seeks to convince us that the church is the most important body of people in the world. God builds society around what happens in the church. The church is in control of history. "You are the salt of the earth," Jesus said {Matt 5:13a RSV}. If the salt loses its savor, becomes saltless, without flavor, the whole world will go to pot. "You are the light of the world," he said {Matt 5:14a RSV}. If the light dims, the whole world will sink into darkness. That is what the Scriptures tell us. Immorality in the world is caused by insincerity in Christians. Darkness among the nations is an outgrowth of ignorance and darkness in the church.

Right now I am involved with a number of Christian leaders trying to plan a conference of national proportions that will encourage pastors to once again return to the expository treatment of the Scriptures. The reason for this is that, everywhere I go, I am saddened and depressed by the biblical ignorance of church members. There is a terrible biblical illiteracy across the face of this apparently Christianized nation. People have only the most superficial knowledge of the Scriptures.

Sometimes this can be observed in the ignorant answers they give to biblical questions. One man said, "I thought Dan and Beersheba were husband and wife, like Sodom and Gomorrah."

Worse than that, they understand nothing of the great secrets of life which the Bible reveals, such as to how to handle their lives, how to understand humanity, and what is happening in the world. That kind of ignorance results in immorality, not so much the blatant, open, sexual type (although that is increasing in the church), but much worse, an inner hardening of the spirit, a manifestation of totally godless attitudes.

Remember that this terrible list, although very similar to a list at the close of Chapter 1 of Romans which describes conditions in the world, is nevertheless really only a description of what is going on in churches and among Christians who have a "form of religion," of "wholesomeness" (the word is godliness, as it has been translated many times in these letters of Paul to Timothy), "a form of godliness but denying the power thereof."

Let us take a closer look at this analysis by the apostle. It falls into four groupings:

The first one flows out of that first term, "lovers of self." That is the basic sin of humanity. Self love, the worship of another god, is the vilest form of idolatry. It deprives God of the worship due to his name, and it places a rival god, oneself, on the throne of an individual life. That is where some Christians are, Paul says. They have not really been changed, they are still lovers of self.

When this condition obtains in the churches, it will also be much more clearly and widely exhibited in the world. Today, we have what is known as the "Me" society. The focus is all on "my" -- my rights, my needs, my views, is all we hear about on every side. The first question that is asked about anything is, "What am I going to get out of it?" Christians oftentimes point the finger at non-Christians, saying, "Look how selfish they are," but the apostle points his finger, and says, that is what is happening in the church. People are not changed, they are "lovers of themselves."

This philosophy has been put rather graphically in a jingle that says,

I had a little tea party
this afternoon at three.
'Twas very small, three guests in all,
just I, myself and me.

Myself ate up the sandwiches,
and I drank up the tea.
'Twas also I who ate the pie,
and passed the cake to me.

That is the way many people live -- a self-centered existence. Out of this flows all the other things in the list.

The first and primary expression of it is in the next words, "lovers of money." Why are Christian people such materialists today? Why do they, like everyone else, seek a constantly increasing standard of living, a much more luxurious lifestyle? It is because money is a way of indulging ourselves. Instead of using it as the Scriptures exhort us to -- to meet the needs of others, to be ready to quickly respond to human need around us, and to delight to use our excess to that purpose -- we oftentimes merely plan to use it to increase our own possessions, to add to our own enjoyment in life.

I read a startling statistic the other day. There are more people in Russia going to church -- that is, in the visible, open churches -- on any given Sunday than go to church in all the rest of western Europe. Isn't that shocking? I have frequently pointed out that when the missionaries were driven out of China in the '50s, everybody said, "Woe to the church. It is going to go through terrible times." And it did. Yet the church in China has increased seven-fold in these years of persecution.

But it is not persecution that destroys a church, it is prosperity. The churches of western Europe have been wide open for anybody to attend them, but they are virtually empty because they have been destroyed by the love of money, materialism, and sensuality

which have gripped and possessed the Christian people of Western Europe. This is the fate that awaits us in the United States if we continue to move along these lines.

Out of this grows another word: "proud." The word is boastful, braggarts. It bothers me to hear churches brag about how many millions of dollars they set aside for missions every year. I welcome the fact that the money is given, but to advertise it, to print it up in brochures that are handed out to others -- I do not know what this does to non-Christians who read it. I am sure it does not impress them very much. They see it as nothing more than the empty boasts of people who are trying to draw attention to themselves rather than to their Lord. That is an outcome of this loving of self.

The word that immediately follows is, "arrogant." Proud people are arrogant people. They have a secret contempt for others; they regard themselves as above them. This is the attitude frequently displayed in many churches and by many Christians today. It often takes the form of a self-righteousness that looks down its nose at people who have fallen into open, blatant sin. Such Christians use derisive terms for homosexuals, for whoremongers, for prostitutes and pornographers. They gather their robes of righteousness around themselves and pronounce judgment with the same attitude of scornful cynicism revealed by the Pharisees in our Lord's day. That is why Jesus spoke so sharply to the Pharisees and so warmly to the prostitutes.

"Abusive" is the next term. This word describes people who use insulting, pejorative terms that put people down. This is the manifestation of an unhealthy, unwholesome, unchristian spirit within the Christian church.

Then there follows a second grouping that centers around family life. This seems to be addressed primarily to younger Christians. The first term is, "disobedient to their parents." Today there is a total breakdown of the home and a rebellion against parental authority. I read a shocking article this past week about the murder in Milpitas that awakened the concern of the whole nation. Teenagers who knew about the murder of a young girl were actually taken by the murderer and shown her body. They were indifferent to this, seemingly apathetic about it, and failed to report it to the authorities.

The reporter who wrote the article found that, as she talked to these young people, many of them expressed the fact that they deliberately carried on basically deceitful lives. One of them said to her, "What we do is act goody-goody at home so we can get out and smoke all the pot we want, sniff cocaine, and have sex any time we like." That is basically deceitful. The young person who said that had no consciousness that it was wrong or hurtful to act that way. This is what the apostle is talking about.

With this Paul links the word "ungrateful." He is referring to younger people, particularly, who are uncaring about the hours of labor their parents have gone through to provide a home and opportunity for them.

This is Mother's Day. I know that many a mother here this morning is being encouraged by her family who have taken time to show in some loving way, not only on this day, but frequently through the year, that they love and appreciate what their mother, or father, has done. Nothing has blessed my life more than to have my children do, as some of them have done, write me a note now and then to say how much they appreciate my love and concern for them. But this attitude is rare in many homes where young people take for granted what is given to them at great cost by their parents.

The next word is "unholy." This word means an unwillingness to observe even the basic decencies of life. It is a flaunting of ungodly actions, a kind of shamelessness that takes pleasure in doing shocking things to provoke reactions from people. With that is linked the word, "inhuman." This means lacking in normal affections, brutish, beastly, cruel. With that is the word, "implacable" -- meaning beyond reason, unappeasable, having a bitter, unrelenting attitude that nobody can talk to or soften in any way.

All of these attitudes occur within the framework of a Christian profession -- of people who say they are Christians, and act as such on Sunday, but during the week, at home and in business, have an entirely different outlook and attitude. They are cruel, vicious and implacable.

Then the list moves to those areas that touch what we call 'interpersonal relationships.' The next word is, "slanderers" -- literally, devils; "profligates" -- people who are ungovernable, who have to satisfy their lust and their passions immediately; "fierce" -- savage people; "haters of good" -- that was our Lord's charge to the Pharisees, that though they were morally respectable, within they were opposers of God and haters of good, and they proved it by putting to death the best man who ever lived; "treacherous" -- the word is used of Judas, the betrayer; and "reckless" -- careless of what happens, entering headlong into things, impulsively reacting without fear of the consequences. Then the last thing, "swollen with conceit," which literally means, swollen-headed, people who think of themselves more highly than they ought.

Finally, the last grouping deals with the religious pretensions of such people -- "lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, holding the form of religion [the outward form -- the word is *eusebeia* -- of godliness, or wholesomeness, a Sunday morning godliness] but denying the power thereof." Why? Why should people who are exposed to the Bible, who profess the truth, sing the hymns, and go through the ritual that is being carried out in thousands of churches across our land today reflect during the week the attitudes described here in such a way that destroy the fabric of society? The answer is in this one phrase: "they deny the

power thereof."

We do not have to guess at what that power is. The Apostle Paul tells us very plainly in First Corinthians, where he says, "The word of the cross ... is the power of God," (1 Cor 1:18 {RSV}). When you let the cross have its effect upon you then you will experience and realize the power of God released. It is the denial of the word of the cross that constitutes this kind of Christianity without Christ, godliness without God, spirituality without the Spirit. The word of the cross is that which puts to death the natural life -- denies self, in other words.

Jesus put it very plainly: "If any man will come after me let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me," {Luke 9:23, cf, Matt 16:24, Mark 8:34}. This is saying that until we are willing, as Christians, to say "No" to what the cross has denied, what it has put to death within us, we cannot enter into that eternal life that is available to us now. Unwilling to deny self means that we are unable to experience life from God. That is the problem.

That is why we lay constant stress upon the fact that we must practice what we preach. We must say "No" to all the risings of the flesh within us in order that we might lay hold of the supply of power and life and vitality which enables us to walk with God in righteousness and truth. Otherwise we contribute to, nay, even cause, these terrible times of stress that repeatedly come upon humanity.

Dr. R. C. Sproul, an emerging young theologian of our day, has pointed out that the Bible divides life into four divisions of humanity:

1. The first group is those who are not saved and know they are not saved. They are the godless, the pagans, we call them, the people who do not profess any form of religion, the atheists, the agnostics of our day, who have no interest in the things of God, and say so openly.
2. Then there are those who are saved, but they are not sure of it. They really have come to Christ, they really do love the Savior, they know they have been born again, but, because they have not been taught properly, they do not understand the promises of God. For one reason or another they think that they will lose their salvation if they slip or fall in any way. When they do, they succumb to despair for weeks and months in a painful condition of uncertainty. This group is not sure of anything about their faith.
3. Then there is the group who are saved and they know it. These are the ones we would call the strong, mature Christians who are growing, evincing a new, changed life. Though they have the normal struggles of everyone else, they show from year to year evidence of progress and growth in these areas. They know they belong to God; they have no doubts about it.
4. Finally, there is a great group, which Scripture faces, of those who are not saved but think they are. That is the group that is being confronted in this passage. Jesus said, "Many shall come to me in that day and say 'Lord, Lord, have we not done many mighty works in your name, and cast out devils in your name, and preached in your name?' And I shall say to them, 'Depart from me, I never knew you.'" {cf, Matt 7:22-23}. They are the cause -- think of it -- of the times of stress that come upon humanity, times such as we are going through right now.

The second factor is described in Verses 6-9. In this section the apostle is describing the rise of strange cults which embrace very confusing concepts and immoral practices; these are begun by people who have been hypocritical Christians. Verse 6:

For among them are those who make their way to households and capture weak women, burdened with sins and swayed by various impulses, who will listen to anybody and can never arrive at a knowledge of the truth. As Jannes and Jambres opposed Moses, so these men also oppose the truth, men of corrupt mind and counterfeit faith; {2 Tim 3:6-8 RSV}

Here Paul reveals two favorite tactics of the devil. Growing out of a morally corrupt and hypocritical church, Christians who talk one way and live another way will come infiltrating into homes that may not be connected with the church at all, and strange, exotic cults will emerge. This always happens in times of stress.

It happened in the 19th century, when cults like Jehovah's Witnesses, Christian Science, Mormonism and others arose. It is happening again in our day. Out of these times of stress are emerging these new cults -- the Moonies, the Eastern-related cults, metaphysical groups, est, and other mind-manipulative groups.

Notice the tactics that are employed:

The first is infiltration. Certain misguided men, for their own benefit and advancement, make their way into households and take captive silly women, rendered vulnerable because of their sense of guilt within, burdened with sin, who will believe anything they are told. Everybody who is a sinner -- and that includes all of us -- cannot escape a sense of guilt. This manifests itself in many ways that are not called guilt, for what people seek to do today is to escape the label *guilt*. But they cannot avoid the fact. It shows up in inner tensions, in

a sense of despair, emptiness, and meaninglessness, or sometimes in a wildly rebellious spirit that seeks to lay hold of pleasure and an unending round of amusement. All this is a manifestation of guilt.

Here Paul speaks of those people who remain at home. In that 1st century culture, and still today, it is the women who remain there. Not all women are weak, by any means; not all fit this category. But some do. There are some women, as there are some men, who are morally weak and vulnerable; and they are intellectually weak -- they will believe anything that is told them, so they can never arrive at the truth. When you believe everything you hear you will never arrive at truth because you are taking in a lot of error along with the truth. With these infiltrative tactics new cults arise.

The second tactic employed by the enemy is imitation, counterfeit faith. Paul says, "Like Jannes and Jambres opposed Moses, so these people will oppose the truth." In the book of Exodus we read that when Moses was sent by God to Pharaoh's court, his brother Aaron did certain miraculous signs in order to impress Pharaoh that he was dealing with the Living God, not a couple of strange shepherds from the country. There were magicians in Pharaoh's court (whose names, Jannes and Jambres, are given to us here, although they are not named in the Old Testament), and they did miracles, just like Aaron did. Finally, Aaron cast Moses' rod down and it became a snake. These magicians cast their rods down and their rods too turned into snakes. But they did it by sleight of hand. Any good magician can pull rabbits out of hats, or snakes out of sleeves. These magicians imitated the miracles of the Living God.

That kind of corrupt, counterfeit faith is what we run into in times of stress, such as we are living in today. The cults offer to do what only God in Christ can do -- give peace of mind, an untroubled heart, forgiveness of sins, a sense of purpose in life. All the riches offered to us in the gospel are also held out by the cults. Many people fall for them, and for a while they think they have found these things. Today you can read testimonies of how people have found, especially in these metaphysical cults, peace of mind, a sense of harmony or a quality of enjoyment of life they never previously possessed. That is true, they do possess that for a while, but it does not last.

As the apostle goes on to say in Verse 9:

But they will not get very far, for their folly will be plain to all, as was that of those two men. {2 Tim 3:9 RSV}

When the serpent which Aaron's rod had formed saw the other two snakes, it ate them up. This was a visible sign that God's power is always more powerful than the devil's. The apostle says that this is what will happen with counterfeit groups. Do not panic, he says to Timothy, evil has its limits. The devil always overreaches himself. His very success at winning converts will ultimately leave people so empty, so hungry of heart, so searching for ultimate truth they become wide open to the appeal of the gospel of Jesus Christ. That is what is happening in our day.

When you read the Great Awakening stories about the Whitefields and the Wesleys of the 18th century you see that these men, though they preached to huge crowds, did not gather them by sending out press agents and advertising in the newspapers. They merely went out on the street corners, even the fields, and began to talk to a few people about the gospel. But the whole English nation was so hungry, so empty, so lonely, miserable, and depressed that they began to flock to hear these men. The word so spread that whenever they started preaching people would come running to hear them. John Wesley and George Whitefield often found that, though they began by speaking to just a few people, before they were through they would be addressing a crowd of ten thousand or more. I think that is what we are headed for in the future. Times of stress are also times of great opportunity, when God uses the devil's very deceitfulness to outwit him, and to prepare the hearts of people for a genuine pouring out of the blessings of God.

Remember, then, that hypocrisy and insincerity in the church is what was produced the times of crisis that are described here. We are living heirs today of the lukewarmness of the churches of the '20s and '30s of this century. God's righteous judgments always are based upon reality. He knows what is in the heart. If we think we are fooling God by our coming to church, by singing hymns, by faithfully attending Bible studies, but not allowing the Word to get at our self-indulgent lives and change us, we will awake sooner or later only to find we are fooling ourselves.

These are strong, searching words from the apostle's pen.

He goes on in the next section to tell us how to oppose these conditions, what to do in the midst of them, how to live in these times of stress.

Prayer

Lord, thank you for how accurately you describe what happens in our world. Thank you also that there is something we can do about it. We can be real, not phony, people; we can be genuine, not hypocritical; we can allow the Word to change us from the heart outward, and not dress up the outside merely to impress others. We pray in Jesus' name, Amen.

Title: Dangerous Times
By: Ray C. Stedman
Series: Studies in Second Timothy
Scripture: 2 Tim 3:1-9
Message No: 8
Catalog No: 3789
Date: May 9, 1982

WHAT YOU SEE IS WHAT YOU CAN BE

by Ray C. Stedman

Last week we looked at the passage in Second Timothy 3 which describes, in very graphic terms, the times of distress which will come repeatedly during this period of "the last days," that is, the period between our Lord's first coming until he returns again.

Without a doubt we are going through one of those times of stress today. The evidence is visible on every side:

- There is the rocketing rate of teenage suicide. I was shocked the other day to read that in the past year suicide among teenagers has increased some 200% over what it was the previous year. This speaks of widespread despair among young people as they look to a future that seems bleaker and blacker than ever before.
- Then there is the marriage burn-out syndrome we are so familiar with.
- Also, nuclear war jitters are now stirring up people to protest and demonstrate against the nuclear arms race.
- Then there are the familiar figures of drug and alcohol addiction and the resulting violent outbursts that startle us from time to time.

Some of this stress comes very close to home. Some of you who have been laid off work are feeling stress. Others are experiencing family breakups, or facing physical crises. All these are part of the times of stress that people have to endure.

When such circumstances arise, the question, "How can a Christian cope?" always comes up. What do we do in response to such times of pressure? As he was writing to Timothy, the Apostle Paul understood that this would be Timothy's question too. Paul had left him in the pagan environment of Ephesus to lead the leaders of the church there. Timothy undoubtedly was questioning in his own heart what he could do to withstand the pressure of the times. How could he resist being swept along into hard-hearted cynicism, blatant immorality, or blasphemy, bitterness and resentment in his heart against the workings of God? How do we stand in such times?

The apostle answers by giving Timothy two simple things to do. Today we will take the first of these. (This section runs from 2 Timothy 3:10 through the end of the chapter.) In the first part, Paul says to Timothy, "Remember my model. Do what I did. Do what you saw me do when you traveled with me these past 15 or 16 years. Remember my example." The second thing Paul says to Timothy is, "Trust the Scriptures to guide you. This Book is given to help us through times of persecution, stress and difficulty. It is the book of reality."

What a tremendous impact a good model can make! Last Thursday, Pat Thebus and I joined Howard Bennett, and together we flew in Howard's plane up to central Montana, where I was to speak at the commencement address of the Big Sky Bible College. (The college was not even built when I lived in that part of the country, but I have since had a part in its ministry.) It was a great experience for me, because Lewistown, where the school is located, is only 40 miles from the tiny Montana town where I graduated from high school, I am ashamed to say it, almost 50 years ago.

We went up a day early so that I could see what had happened in the 44 years since I had been in that town. It was a sentimental journey. It was a moving experience for me to meet some of my old classmates, to see how much of the town was still standing, and how much it had been built up since.

One of the things that made a deep impression on me was to drive past the ranch, just a mile or so out of town, where a rancher and his wife, who bore no relationship to me, nevertheless virtually adopted me as a son when I was in high school. I had spent many happy hours there doing the usual work of a ranch. But I was especially drawn to the rancher, who was like a father to me. Memories of all the things he had taught me and modeled for me -- patience, fortitude, manliness and humor -- came flooding back

into my mind as I drove past the place where we had spent so many happy times together.

I am sure that is what the Apostle Paul is seeking to do here with Timothy. He reminds Timothy that he had set before him an example, so he says to him, "Do what I did." Here are Paul's words. Second Timothy 3:10:

Now you have observed by teaching, my conduct, my aim in life, my faith, my patience, my love, my steadfastness, my persecutions, my sufferings, what befell me at Antioch, at Iconium, and at Lystra, what persecutions I endured; yet from them all the Lord rescued me.
{ 2 Tim 3:10-11 RSV }

When Paul says, "You observed this," he uses a very strong word in the Greek, which means, "You came right along with me; you accompanied me through all of this; you saw all these things, now don't forget them."

When we ask ourselves, "What did Paul do when his world threatened to come apart, how did he react in that first generation of Christians, when the whole Roman world was about to explode in warfare, when pagan pressure and superstition abounded on every side and the civilized world seemed to be given over to widespread sexual immorality?" We must notice the first thing Paul says: "Timothy, you observed my teaching." What did Paul do when the world was in trouble? He taught the truth; he reminded himself and his hearers of what is real about life; he exposed the illusions and the delusions of his day to the revelation of Scripture so that people could get their heads on straight and think rightly, truly and realistically about life. That encourages me a great deal, because I believe that every Christian ought to be able to teach the truth about life from the Word of God. We desperately need this today.

A few weeks ago I watched a group of young pastors on the East Coast as they listened to a man of some prominence reveal to them and review for them the terrible nuclear threat that hangs over the world today. He described in very graphic terms what a nuclear holocaust would be like, the awful threat of the virtual elimination of life from the face of the earth if the superpowers should ever resort to nuclear war. He was doing this to try to stir them to protest and to get involved in demonstrations against the nuclear arms race.

I watched these young pastors become sober and fearful as they listened. It struck me that there was something missing, that though this threat is very real -- there is no question that a nuclear holocaust would result in the virtual destruction of the human race -- nevertheless, that is not what the Scriptures say about life. There was a missing element.

During the course of the discussion that followed I was able to suggest that we needed to turn to the Word of God and learn again of his sovereignty over human events; that God, not man, is in charge of this world; that man proposes but God disposes; that there are limits to man's ability to carry out his evil purposes, and we needed to see again that God puts in the hands of Christians spiritual weapons by which to influence the times in which we live. As we talked about these things, I could sense a spirit of renewed hope and of challenge come into the hearts of these young pastors.

I believe that is what the Scriptures are for: they are to guide us in times of despair, of pressure, and of stress. The very first thing the Apostle Paul would do would be to give himself to proclaiming the mighty revelation of God, to help men see again that God is in charge of life.

Then, not only was Paul's teaching involved, but, as he puts it, so was his conduct. "You observed my conduct," he says. That means that when he was confronted with danger, persecution, and stress, he behaved himself; he practiced what he preached. By returning to the word of faith, Paul controlled his temper, subdued his lusts, mastered his passions, conquered his fears, and forgave his enemies. He did what God told him to do: He worked with his hands, he supported himself, he prayed for his friends, he kept himself growing and walking in the Spirit because he knew that was the greatest thing he could do to counteract the fear, the depression and danger of the times in which he lived.

These first two words are very important. They have direct relevance to us. How should we react to such times? Paul's answer is, let us teach; let us open men's eyes and hearts to what God is doing in this world. There is a conspiracy of silence against that today. That is why people are scared to death. They live in downright, abject fear because of what the future holds for them. How wonderful for Christians to be able to unfold the realities of life to people and to manifest those realities in their own conduct! That is the greatest thing we can do to steady the world in this time of danger.

Not only did Paul model his actions for Timothy, but he also modeled his attitudes. He says, "Remember my aim in life, my faith, my patience, my love, my steadfastness." Those are great qualities which the apostle had set as an example before this young man.

The most important of them is the first one, Paul's aim in life. Paul did not do anything that did not relate to what was, for him, the most important thing in life. He himself tells us in many places, notably in Second Corinthians, what that was:

**Whether at home or away [i.e., in the body or out of the body], we make it our aim to please him."
(2 Cor 5:9 {RSV})**

Everything Paul did in life was done with the understanding that it would either please the Lord Jesus or it would result in grief of heart to him. That was Paul's guiding light.

I find there are many Christians today who think that when you become a Christian you get unusual power to enable you to do special things, miracles, etc. But Christianity is not a way of doing special things, it is a special way of doing everything. Paul's special aim in everything he did was to please the Lord Jesus. What a simple thing that is, and yet how profoundly it would affect us if we would ask ourselves a dozen times a day, "Is what I am saying, what I am doing, what I am thinking, pleasing to my Lord? Does it reflect his beauty, his character, his loveliness?"

With this the apostle links his faith, because that is what made his aim possible. Faith is the confidence that there exist certain invisible realities which are extremely important to us, and then acting in the light of those realities. Faith is believing that God is at work in running human affairs, and that he will give us power to love and to speak with gentleness and graciousness when we are being mistreated or abused. Faith is the consciousness of invisible realities. Paul tells Timothy that that is the key to his behavior.

Then there was the apostle's patience. This was always with regard to people. Sometimes it is hard to be patient with people.

I have found that not everybody is as lovely, gracious, sweet and easy to get along with as I am, so there are times when I am tempted to be impatient with those stupid people who cannot respond like I do! They, of course, are thinking the same thing about me.

That is why the Word of God says that one of the characteristics of a true Christian life is that we learn to develop patience. We sometimes say, "Don't bug me. Don't push me. Let me have time to work this out. Give me some breathing room. Get off my back." Others feel that way too. If you want others to be patient, then surely it is only right that they should expect you to be patient with them. That is what the Scriptures exhort us to do. Paul had demonstrated this to Timothy, and he reminds him of it

With that Paul links love. This is the word, above all others, that ought to describe the Christian approach. Love means an acceptance of everyone as being valuable; you do not regard anyone with contempt or disdain, you do not put anyone down. You understand that, though people may be struggling, though they may be difficult, nevertheless, they are valuable. God loves them; God has made them in his own image. People have great possibilities if they are touched in the right way. This is what Christian love manifests.

Finally, there is the quality of steadfastness. That means endurance, not quitting when the pressures get rough, hanging in there, not merely in a grin-and-bear-it attitude, but rather with a confidence that God is working things out.

Someone told the story of the man in a testimony meeting who said, "My favorite Scripture is the verse that says, 'And it came to pass,' because when something happens to me I remind myself that it didn't come to stay, it came to pass." If you wait, it will pass.

But Paul says to wait in cheerfulness, triumph, and quietness of heart.

Not only did Paul model his actions and his attitudes, but he specifically reviews for Timothy certain persecutions and sufferings that he underwent. He says, "You have observed my persecutions, my sufferings, what befell me at Antioch, at Iconium, and at Lystra, what persecutions I endured."

I believe that you never really get to know anybody until you know what he has been through. Recently I read the book by Elton Trueblood, *Abraham Lincoln, Theologian of American Anguish*. The book traces the years of Lincoln's presidency, a time when he was growing by leaps and bounds in Christian stature as a mature believer in Christ. The key to his growth was the personal anguish he suffered. Not only was there the terrible pressure of the war between the States -- he took very personally and felt very keenly the awful bloodbath the nation was passing through as thousands of boys from both North and South were dying on the fields of battle -- but his favorite son, his beloved 12-year-old Willie, died while he was President. There were also the daily vituperative attacks of the press upon him. He was lampooned, ridiculed, mocked and insulted in most of the papers. There was widespread opposition against him.

Rather than crushing him, rather than making him react with anger, bitterness, and vituperation in return, however, all of this humbled Lincoln. As he himself put it, "I was often driven to my knees with the overwhelming conviction that I had nowhere else to go." If you go to Washington, visit the Lincoln Memorial and read there the words of the Second Inaugural Address, to my mind one of the greatest words any statesman ever uttered. There you will see that through all the agony, the pressure and the anguish that he underwent, Lincoln came to understand and to see more clearly, perhaps, than many of his successors the

sovereignty of God in national affairs; how the hand of God was governing the conduct of the war and bringing about judgment on a people that would result in righteousness, justice, and truth in the land again.

Here Paul is reminding Timothy, "You were with me during many of those times of persecution. Remember how at Antioch I had to leave town lest my life be taken, how at Iconium I was driven out by a lynch mob, and how at Lystra I was stoned and left for dead outside the city walls." Yet Paul adds these words, "But out of them all the Lord delivered me." Timothy was with Paul in many other times of trouble, but these early experiences evidently burned themselves into his mind.

There is nothing like the shock value of the first discovery of truth. The apostle is trying to remind Timothy here of the surprise he must have felt when he realized that an apostle of the Lord Jesus Christ, Lord of heaven and earth, could and would suffer like Paul did. This gives an adequate answer to the idea abroad today that, when you become a Christian, God protects you from all kinds of danger, that you never get into any peril but God saves you from it, that God goes to work for you to make you prosperous. That is not what Paul experienced. If that is the sign of successful Christianity, then Paul was the greatest failure of all Christians because he suffered these many experiences. He reminds Timothy that is what God had designed.

But the fourth factor that Paul reveals here, and which he modeled for Timothy, is undoubtedly the most important of all. It is found in these words:

... yet from them all the Lord rescued me. Indeed all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted, while evil men and impostors will go on from bad to worse, deceivers and deceived. {2 Tim 3:11b-13}

The bottom line of how to stand in times of pressure is right here. Paul knew the secret of the Divine Presence: the Lord was with him, working in all the events of his life. In everything Paul did, Jesus Christ walked with him and was beside him to strengthen and help him.

You cannot read Paul's letters without seeing that every one of them focuses upon the amazing truth that in all the difficult times and all the blessed times of his life, his Lord stood with him. We need to rediscover this secret today. Paul saw Jesus as Lord in charge of all events,

- "the One who opens and no man shuts, the One who shuts and no man opens" {cf, Rev 3:7b};
- The One who lays a restraining hand upon the violent people of earth so that they can go only so far and no further;
- The One who restrains mobs and opens a door of escape in times of distress;
- The One who prepares men and women to be ready to respond when the Word is preached.

Paul saw Jesus as his own personal Savior

- Who forgave him his sins,
- Who picked him up when he was discouraged,
- Who stood by him in times of pressure.

He saw Jesus as his Companion, as his dearest Friend who never left him.

That is the secret of standing today. Christianity was never intended to be merely a creed that you believe, or certain doctrines that you subscribe to. Christianity is a Person whom you know, whom you live with, rely upon and walk with day-by-day.

But even more: Paul not only understood the secret of the Divine Presence, but also that his very trials were part of a designed course. In fact, he says, "All who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted, while evil men and impostors will go on from bad to worse, deceivers and deceived."

That very remarkable statement is saying that true Christianity is always a counter-culture movement; it is always against the grain.

You will not always be popular when you stand and speak as a Christian. Sometimes you will; sometimes your words will be welcomed, and reckoned as cold water on a hot day. On other occasions, what you say will be sneered at, ridiculed, and laughed at; you will be put down and rejected. All that is part of being a Christian. That is what it means to "stand" in these days.

There is a phony "folk Christianity" around today that will enable you to apparently escape all these persecutions. In every church there are people who are trying to put on a Christian front. Paul spoke about them in the passage we looked at last week, describing them as, "having a form of godliness but denying the power thereof," (2 Tim 3:5 {KJV}). They act like Christians, they read the Book, and sing the hymns, but they have no reality of Christ in their lives. That kind of Christianity does escape a lot of persecution because it never stands for anything. But, in the end, it perishes along with the world; it is destroyed in the

judgments of God. I know that many people who come to church reflect the attitude that says,

I would like to buy \$3.00 worth of God, please. Not enough to explode my soul, or disturb my sleep, but just enough to equal a cup of warm milk or a snooze in the sunshine. I don't want enough of Him to make me love a Black man, or to pick beets with a migrant. I want ecstasy, not transformation. I want the warmth of the womb, not a new birth. I want a pound of the eternal in a paper sack. I would like to buy just \$3.00 worth of God, no more.

That kind of Christianity is worthless. It does nothing to stem the tide of corruption and disaster toward which the human race is headed. If we want to be men and women of God, we are to follow the models that are held before us.

As this age draws to a close, evil will increase, the apostle says. Men and women who believe their own lies will speak with intense conviction so that many will follow in their evil ways, victims of the great deceiver, the god of this world, the devil. But if you want to stand against the stream, if you want to make your life count in these days, then do what Paul did:

- Teach the truth; spread it around. Let people know what is right and real about life from the Book which you hold in your hand.
- Live righteously: Practice what you preach.
- Expect trouble, because you will get it. There will be times when what you say will be very unpopular, but that does not stop you from saying it and living it.
- Above all else, walk with the Lord. Love the Lord Jesus. Live in his presence. Draw closer each day to that Divine Lord who walks invisibly in our midst, who is in charge of all the events of earth, controlling them and working them out to his one great purpose which he shall bring to pass.

God knows that things are going to get worse and worse -- he intended them to -- but he has planted within that decaying, corrupting, morally imperfect civilization men and women like you and me who are given the privilege of standing for truth and righteousness in a day of declension.

May God grant that we will be such people.

Prayer

Our Father, we pray that you will forgive us for the many times we have allowed the world to creep into our thinking and guide our conduct, when we have faded into the background and been lost in the crowd on its way to darkness, delusion and hell. Grant to us Lord the courage and the grace to stand, impelled by this Divine Presence within, that we might be workmen who need not be ashamed, rightly handling the Word of truth. We pray in Jesus' name, Amen.

Title: What you See is What you can Be

By: Ray C. Stedman

Series: Studies in Second Timothy

Scripture: 2 Tim 3:10-13

Message No: 9

Catalog No: 3790

Date: May 16, 1982

THINKING CHRISTIANLY

by Ray C. Stedman

The question being addressed by the Apostle Paul throughout his second letter to Timothy is, "How can a Christian survive during stressful and pressure-filled times? In a world gone insane with hate and passion, amidst a race that is destroying itself with moral filth and shameless self-indulgence, in a church which 'maintains the form of religion but denies the power thereof,' how can a Christian maintain his integrity against the current of the day?" When these times of stress -- which the apostle describes so eloquently in the opening words of Chapter 3 of the letter -- come upon us with their pressuring, smothering, overwhelming push to sweep away our faith and destroy all that we believe in, what are we to do?

Paul's answer is two-fold:

First, he says, "Do what I have done. All through my ministry I came up against those kinds of pressures." What the apostle did is quite evident:

1. "Continue teaching the truth," he says; then,
2. "Live righteously in action and attitude by the power of the God who indwells you"; and
3. Third, "Trust the Lord Jesus. The battle is the Lord's, not ours."

The second part of Paul's answer, "Saturate your mind with the Scriptures. Let your thinking be controlled by the Word of God" -- is what we will be looking at today. Here are the apostle's words:

But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it and how from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings which are able to instruct you for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work. (2 Tim 3:14-16 {RSV})

The emphasis of that passage upon the written Word of God is inescapable. It is impossible to follow the model we looked at last week unless we also do what the apostle tells us to do here, which is, saturate our thinking with the word and the thoughts of God. We evangelicals have often been accused of being Bible worshippers. Some have accused us of having a "paper Pope," i.e., settling everything by the Word of God and indulging in bibliolatry, the worship of the Book itself. But that is far from the truth. We do revere the truth that the Book teaches us, and we honor the channel through which it comes, but we worship only the God whom the Book reveals. We ought to take to heart John Wesley's great word about the Bible:

I am a creature of a day. I am a spirit come from God and returning to God. I want to know one thing: the way to Heaven. God himself has condescended to teach me in that way: He has written it down in a Book. O, give me that Book. At any price give me the Book of God. Let me be a man of one Book.

That summarizes beautifully the Christian view of the Scriptures. The Bible is the Book which points the way to God, which opens the mind of God to us and thus enables us to think God's thoughts after him.

In the passage before us the apostle outlines, first, the process by which the Scriptures lay hold of our minds. He says to Timothy, "Continue in what you have learned." That is the first thing to do with the Bible -- learn what it says. Timothy had only the Old Testament, and, perhaps, just a few of the books which we call the Old Testament. The Gospels of Matthew and Mark might have been circulating then. He probably had most of the letters of Paul, because this is the last of them. Timothy was with him when he wrote some of those, so he likely preserved them for his own reading. But he had the written Word of God; and Paul commends him here that he has learned what it had to say.

That requires repeated reading. You cannot learn what the Bible has to say by reading it through once. There must be repeated, perhaps even daily, exposure to the written Word of God. The case for Bible reading is very simple put: There is no other way by which you can be exposed to the thinking of God except by reading the Word of God. The Bible is not in tune with secular philosophy. It is different than all the other books in the world because it is a compendium of the thoughts of God about human life. God is the ultimate realist. In the Bible he has condescended to give us his thoughts on everything about ourselves, about the world in which we live, the times that come upon us, about the morals and ethics of our behavior.

The Bible exposes us to what Paul calls in First Corinthians, "The secret and hidden wisdom of God, ... [which] none of the rulers of this age understand; for if they had they would not have crucified the Lord of glory," {cf, 1 Cor 2:7-8 RSV}. Think of that. If the leaders of thought of the Lord's day had understood the thoughts of God they would not have made the terrible mistake of putting to death the One who is truth himself. Because the world does not know what is in this Book, it makes abominable mistakes. That is why it is so important that you expose yourselves to the Word of God.

I want to point out two things that this will do for you:

First, it will drastically alter your own thinking. You cannot read this Book without being changed. You will think differently about yourself and others; you will regard your husband, or your wife, and your children in a totally different way. You will regard the frantic pursuit of wealth and pleasure, which the world goes in for, in a different light. You will make decisions on a totally different basis.

This Book will drastically alter the way you behave. I could tell you stories by the hour of how individuals started to read the Bible and had their whole outlook changed, sometimes within a short time.

There is, for instance, the true story of the mutiny on the Bounty. A group of British sailors on the ship H.M.S. Bounty mutinied in the early part of the nineteenth century, seized the ship and fled to the island of Pitcairn in the South Pacific. There they hid from British justice for many years. But they were such a community of cut-throats that their life there was desperate and dangerous. They were so debauched and degraded that they started killing each other off, until it looked as though their colony

would only last a few years before it would be destroyed by their own debauchery.

Then one of the mutineers, Alexander Smith, found a Bible which his mother had placed in his trunk. He began to read it, and soon his own life was changed as he came to know the Lord through the Book. He taught it to the others and rather quickly life on the island took on a wholly different cast. When the mutineers were discovered, they were found to have an almost ideal community. There was no jail because there was no crime. They were godly people, every family among them transformed by the power of the Word of God.

That is the amazing quality of this Book. There is no other book in all of history that has that kind of a record. When you start reading your Bible you will find your thinking changed. You will be enabled to live realistically, to adjust to reality, to detect the confusions and the illusions of the world around and to correct the things that are destroying humanity.

The truth of the Bible leads to life, not death. Anybody who believes that truth, and acts on it, will become enriched. Life becomes peaceful, calm, and joyful even in the midst of trouble. The Bible invariably imparts an inner strengthening to those who live by it, as we read in the well-known passage from Proverbs:

**My son, keep sound wisdom and discretion;
let them not escape from your sight,
and they will be life for your soul
and adornment for your neck.
Then you will walk on your way securely
and your foot will not stumble.
If you sit down, you will not be afraid;
when you lie down, your sleep will be sweet. Do not be afraid of sudden panic,
or of the ruin of the wicked, when it comes; for the Lord will be your confidence
and will keep your foot from being caught. (Prov 3:21-26 {RSV})**

That is part of the heritage of those who learn to understand and read the Bible. That will take some time. You cannot understand the Bible by putting it on the coffee table. Even putting it under your pillow will not work -- it does not soak into the mind that way. You have to open it and read it.

Let me suggest what may perhaps be the most helpful thing in making that possible -- turn off the television. Our generation is being robbed of great opportunities to learn the truth of this amazing Book by the continual flood of entertainment offered on television. It is so easy to sit in front of the TV and keep yourself occupied with entertaining ideas and thoughts -- sometimes very boring entertainment too -- when this Book lies ready at hand to open you to realities that will never forsake you. You know, in Glory I do not think we will remember even a single television program, but heaven is built around the precepts and principles reflected in this Book, and it will go on for all eternity. So I want to urge you to read the Bible, and read books that explain the Bible. Fill your mind with the Scripture. That will steady you in the times of stress like nothing else will.

Then the apostle points out a second thing. Not only did Timothy learn these things, he believed them. Paul says,

... continue in what you have learned and have fully believed, {2 Tim 3:14b RSV}

Timothy acted upon what he had learned. You do not really believe something until you practice it. James says, "Be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves," (Jas 1:22 {RSV}). It does not do a bit of good to say you believe the Bible from cover to cover, like some people do. (I don't do that -- I have some trouble with the maps in the back!) Do what it says. Practice the truth, act on it, take it to heart. The process begins with the mind being instructed, then the heart being fully convinced, then you practice what you believe.

I do not know what it was that may have helped Timothy, but I am sure that when he read a statement like, "Lie not one to another" {cf, Col 3:9}, he was careful to watch his words and stop lying, if that was what he was doing. When he read, "Bless those who persecute you" {Rom 12:14a RSV}, he realized that even though he, like everyone else, felt anger rising within him and he wanted to strike back when he was mistreated, that was the wrong thing to do. The Word of God taught that it was necessary for him to lean on the grace of God, to pray for people and find a way to do something good rather than evil in return. When he read, "Freely you have received, freely give" {Matt 10:8b KJV}, he was encouraged to be generous, to help others with what he himself had been blessed with instead of holding it to himself. When he read, "Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world" {1 Jn 2:15a KJV}, he knew that it was time he stopped pursuing all the pleasure -- mad things which others were pursuing, to give himself to being available to meet the needs of others and to teach the Word of truth. Thus he believed, he put into practice, what he was taught.

The apostle suggests two factors here which helped Timothy believe the Scriptures:

First, the Scriptures came to him, Paul says, through certain loved and trusted people "Knowing from whom you learned it," Paul

says. One of the things that makes believing the Bible much easier is when it comes to us through people we trust. In Timothy's case, his mother Eunice and his grandmother Lois were the channels by which he was taught the Word of God.

Being of Jewish background, I am sure they followed the exhortation of Deuteronomy 6, where Moses taught the people how to teach their children. Moses did not say to have a classroom in the home where children learn something by rote. Rather, he said, teach them

- When they rise up (when they get up in the morning),
- When they sit down (at mealtime), and
- When they go to bed at night.

Those are the teachable moments. Reflect out of the experiences of their day truth from the Scriptures that will lock itself into the hearts of young children. What a powerful impact this mighty apostle made upon Timothy! He never forgot what he had learned because it came through one whom he deeply respected, one whom he saw had answers to the difficulties and problems of life.

The second factor is that this came to Timothy at a very early age. "From childhood you have learned this," Paul says. Parents should not miss that emphasis. It indicates that childhood is a wonderful time to get the truth of the Scriptures into a young person's heart.

As a young boy, 10 or 11 years old, I was given many memory verses in Sunday School and Daily Vacation Bible School which I had committed to memory. I remember those verses yet today. A child's mind is easily impressed, not only with Christian truth, but with all kinds of truth. When I was a freshman in high school, I memorized the Preface to Chaucer's "Canterbury Tales" in the original Old English. I can still say it. I am not going to bore you with it this morning, but I can bring it up any time I want to. (Although I have not found many occasions when Chaucer's "Canterbury Tales" seemed to exactly fit.) But it is there when I want it, and so are the memory verses which I committed to heart as a young boy. I grant you they are in the King James Version, so I have to clean them up sometimes to get the thee's, thou's, hath's and hath not's out of them. They are hard to say and people have a hard time understanding them. I wish somebody had had me memorize verses from an RSV -- a Ray Stedman Version! Unfortunately I had to work with the King James. But the truth was there; that is the point. What a wonderful thing to have learned from early childhood the truth of the Word of God through those most precious and trusted.

The third thing the apostle comments on is the result of learning and believing the Scriptures. Notice what he says (Verse 15):

... and how from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings which are able to instruct you for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. {2 Tim 3:15 RSV}

The effect of the Scriptures is to save us, to transform us, to keep us from the downhill slide that is evident in every life not in touch with the Word of God. I do not think there is a person in this congregation this morning who, looking back upon his life, is not aware of the fact that all his dreams, ideals, and hopes were not realized until he began to walk according to the light of the Word of God. Everybody starts out life with certain hopes, dreams, and ideals, but unless he has the guiding of the Scriptures, inevitably he will find himself not moving toward, but away from the high ideals with which he began. That is the certain fate of those who do not have the guideline of Scripture. But Timothy had, and it was transforming him, delivering him, saving him.

It was not, of course, the Scripture that saved him. The Bible itself does not save anybody, but the Scriptures are able to bring us to faith in Christ Jesus. He is the one who saves us. The Jesus who saves is the Jesus who is revealed only in the Bible. The only way we can come to know this Redeemer, this Savior of men, this One who can deliver us from the bondage of our own selfishness, is revealed in the pages of the Scriptures. That is the uniqueness of the Bible. In it you will find revealed a Person, and he will become even more real to you than the Book itself. That is the wonder and the glory of the Scriptures.

Dr. Donald Grey Barnhouse, for years pastor of the great Tenth Presbyterian Church in Philadelphia, used to illustrate in this fashion the way some people approach the Bible. He would tell of imagining himself renting a room in a resort hotel in which there was a window which looked out on the beauty and the vast expanse of the ocean. He would imagine himself sitting in that room, writing a letter to a friend who had never seen the ocean, and saying,

My room looks out through a window onto the ocean. Let me describe it to you The window is about 4 feet high and 6 feet wide, and it is covered by a pane of glass which is exactly 3/8" thick. I have taken some parings and scrapings of that glass and had them analyzed, and find that it is a very fine grade of glass, the best you can buy. In fact, I am attaching to this letter a research article on the kind of glass this is, where it is produced, what kind of sand it is made from, the process by which it is manufactured, and how it is finely spread out in open form and put in a window like this. I find that the window is locked into place by a substance that is called putty. It is a most unusual substance. It is very pliable at first, then it gets harder as it is allowed to dry. It is made of a strange chemical substance, and I have attached to this letter a series of research papers done on putty. If you read it through, you will understand the high quality and high grade of this putty. I have also attached a series of studies on the art of putting glass into windows, and the kind of training it takes to be a window installer, etc., etc., etc.

The folly of all that talk about the window, of course, is that nothing is said about what he could see through the window.

Many people study the Bible that way. They focus on all the details of the Book and fail to see the One whom the Book reveals. They fail to look through the window to the great ocean of Jesus Christ himself, the Son of the Living God, the Savior of men. They fail to understand who he is, that he has come to dwell within us, to fill us, to strengthen us, and to deliver us, to forgive us and guide us through life, that all power in heaven and earth is given unto him. There is no point in reading the Bible unless you see whom it points to. "I know," Paul says in Chapter 1 of this letter {Verse 12}, "whom I have believed" -- not what I have believed. The glory of this Book is that it brings us face to face with Jesus Christ himself.

How did the Bible develop this amazing quality? Paul's answer is in one remarkable phrase: He says, "All scripture is inspired by God." Unfortunately, the word *inspired* is exactly the reverse of the word that should be there. Inspired comes from a Latin word, *spiro* means to breathe, and *in* means "in," so it means "to breathe in." But that is exactly what God did not do with the Bible. He did not breathe it in. He breathed it out. The Greek word means, "breathed out from God." What we ought to say is "All scripture is outspired by God" -- breathed out from him. Peter says virtually the same thing: "Holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Spirit of God," {cf, 2 Pet 1:21 KJV}. Genesis tells us that God created man by heaping up a pile of dirt and breathing into it, out from himself, the spirit of life, and man became a living being. The wonder of this Book is that is what God did with the words of it.

Many are struggling with this today. They say, "We know how these words came to us. Sinful and fallible men who are just like us wrote them down, so their words are no more trustworthy than ours." The answer to that is in this phrase. Just as God breathed into the dust of the ground and made it be a living, vital person, so he breathed into the words of men the Spirit of vitality and life. So these words have a unique quality about them: Whenever a heart is touched by them it moves toward life. That is the quality of the Word of God.

According to the apostle, that means the Bible can do four things for everyone who reads and believes it:

First, it will teach you: it is "profitable for teaching." The Bible will instruct your mind about things that no one, except God, knows anything about. It will tell you things about yourself, what can happen to you, and what will happen to you, that only God knows.

Everybody wants to know these things. For instance, everyone wants to know what lies beyond death. You will not find a magazine rack today that does not have displayed on the front page of some magazine an article entitled, "New Evidence For Life After Death," or words to that effect. People are hungry to know that lies beyond. They are asking "Is this all there is? Are we just going to fade away and crumble into dust, or is there something beyond?" The human mind has been questing in that area all through history. But there is only one Book that will tell you the answer to that question. It tells about One who came back from the grave and told us what is beyond. He demonstrated in ways that can never be denied, or explained away, that he had returned from death. Thus this Book becomes a reliable guide in areas we know nothing about.

What about angels? This Book will instruct you.

More important than that, it will tell you what is wrong with this crazy mixed-up world of ours. Why do we act the way we do when we know it is wrong? What is this strange power that grips us, this evil tendency that permeates all of our civilization, where we want to destroy one another, to bomb each other out of existence? Why can't we do anything about it?

Why can't we educate it away or legislate it away? This Book will tell you the answers. The Bible has the power to teach men what they cannot otherwise know.

Second, the Bible has the power to reprove. The word is really *convict*. How many of you have had the experience of reading the Bible and becoming aware that something you had been doing all your life, something you did not think was wrong at all, was the reason why you yourself were hurting or were hurting others? The Bible suddenly made you aware that, in order to be free, you had to change, you had to commit yourself to a different direction. That is called *conviction*. The Bible has tremendous power to point out to people the areas of wrongdoing in their lives.

But more than that, the Bible never does that without setting you on the right path, correcting you and making you walk in ways that lead to life. The amazing testimony of this Book is that, when taken seriously, it leads people to freedom and to life; while those who follow the principles and practices that this Book warns about are always led to degradation, to enslavement, to a narrowing and limiting of the joys and the beauties of existence. That is a marvelous record that is universally true.

Finally, the Bible is for "training in righteousness." That phrase suggests that the Bible has the power to finely tune you, like a skillful coach, to enable you to walk day by day in a more righteous way; and righteousness always leads to peace. So the Bible is able to train us, to lead us along into ever-expanding experiences of righteous living.

The one thing that the Bible will make you is described in the closing words,

... that the man of God [that includes women as well] may be complete ["perfect" is the idea], fully equipped for every good work. {2 Tim 3:16 RSV}

In other words, this Book is sufficient to do this. It does not need psychology, or philosophy; it does not need special higher education. Although these things are proper in themselves, and can supplement in many ways some of the things the Bible teaches, they can never replace it.

The Bible does not need any of that in order to produce a man or woman who is "whole"; that is the word. The world is constantly looking for the secret of wholeness. Everyone wants to be a "whole" person, healed of all his inner conflicts, able to cope, able to handle life. That is exactly what this Book is provided for. It is the Book that goes with man. It is the instruction Book that will work out all your kinks and quirks, and enable you to be a whole person as God intended you to be, through faith in the Lord Jesus whom the Book reveals.

I do not know anything more exciting than this Book. I have been studying it for over 40 years, but I never pick it up without a sense of excitement that I am going to see something fresh and new in this amazing Book which never gets old. So I commend to you the reading of the Bible. If your mind and heart are saturated by the wisdom of this Book, it will steady you, and hold you through any time of crisis as it brings you into daily contact with the Lord of the Book.

Dr. Emile Caillet, who died last year, was for many years a professor at Princeton Seminary. In his youth he was a total unbeliever. In fact, he vehemently opposed any kind of faith. He fought in the French Army in World War I, and the terrible pain of human life and death around him confirmed his conviction that there was nothing in religion that could satisfy men. But he longed to have something that would help him in times of difficulty, so he compiled a notebook which he called, "The Book That Would Understand Me." Whenever he ran across a quotation that struck fire in his mind he would copy it down in his book. Still a young man when the war was ended, he sat down one day to read the collection that he had put together. As he read it, his heart sank. He saw that since it came from himself, it had no power to minister to him in times of pressure and stress; it seemed flat and empty.

About that time a remarkable thing occurred. Purely by accident, one day his wife wandered into a courtyard she had never seen before. She realized she was in a Huguenot church, and she saw an old man sitting at a table. For some reason, unknown to her, she walked up to him and asked, "Do you have any Bibles in French?" Without a word, the man picked up a Bible from the table and handed it to her. She was afraid to give it to her husband because he had ordered that religion not even be mentioned in their house, but she finally told him of this unusual experience. He said, "Give me the Bible. Let me read it."

For the first time in his life he began to read the Bible. He started in the Gospels, which fascinated him. For many hours he read through several of the books of the Bible. Finally he put it down, and, bowing his head, he said, "At last I have found the Book that understands me." He opened his heart to the Lord and became a Christian. Ultimately he became a professor in a seminary. He bore testimony to his dying day that he never varied from that view of the Bible: "This is the Book that understands me."

That is the testimony of many.

I trust that this passage will encourage us to discover this Book.

As I travel around America, and around the world, I am troubled that, in church after church today, the congregation is biblically illiterate. They are evangelical churches, but they do not know the Bible; they do not know the great truths of Scripture; they have never realized the radical counterculture movement that this Book represents. As a consequence they are drifting down the broad way that leads to perdition, along with all the rest who do not believe the Book at all, because they know nothing about it.

I hope and pray that this congregation will not be that way, that we will be men and women who cry out, like John Wesley, "O give me that Book. Above all else let me have the Book of God."

The glory of this Book is that it can instruct the mind, touch the heart, and lead us unto full salvation.

Prayer

Our Father, we thank you for this amazing Book. We hold it in our hands, we have it in our homes, but we confess to you how infrequently we open it up and let it speak to us. Help us to cease those practices, to turn off our televisions and our radios and let this Book minister to our hearts and minds through Christ Jesus; that we may know him before whom one day this whole world will stand, and every knee shall bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. We ask in his name, Amen.

Title: Thinking Christianly
By: Ray C. Stedman
Series: Studies in Second Timothy
Scripture: 2 Tim 3:14-16
Message No: 10
Catalog No: 3791
Date: May 23, 1982

THE MAJESTY OF MINISTRY

by Ray C. Stedman

We are now approaching the climax of the Apostle Paul's second letter to Timothy. From the loneliness of his prison cell in Rome, and in view of his approaching martyrdom which he knows is coming, Paul addresses these solemn words to Timothy, who is far away in pagan Ephesus:

I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus who is to judge the living and the dead, and by his appearing and his kingdom: preach the word, be urgent in season and out of season, convince, rebuke, and exhort, be unfailing in patience and in teaching. For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own likings, and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander into myths." (2 Tim 4:1-4 {RSV})

No other passage in Scripture describes more accurately the day in which we live. This underscores again what we have seen many times already in Second Timothy, that, though this was written almost 2,000 years ago, it is highly relevant to our own day.

In these words, the apostle is obviously seeking to open Timothy's eyes to the importance of what he is called to do. Paul flings back the boundaries of time and space to reveal to Timothy the unseen realities before whom every Christian lives and labors, reminding him of the great personages who are involved in his witness in Ephesus: "I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus who is to judge the living and the dead," Paul says.

There is nothing more helpful to us in the midst of pressure than to realize that what we are doing is a very important thing; yet there is nothing harder for us to understand about our own Christian ministry than that fact. Like Timothy, we see ourselves as a tiny minority amidst an overwhelming, mounting majority committed to evil and unbelief. Our voice seems to be a mere whisper in the tumult of chaos and the clamor of voices that speak and echo other things today. Most of us think of ourselves, and of our day to day commitment to walk with Christ, as being almost insignificant, that we are contributing nothing to arrest the downhill slide of our day, that we cannot speak with any impact at all against the voices of unbelief we hear on every side.

I am sure Timothy felt that way too. As we have been seeing all through this letter, in his day there was an upsurge in evil and an increase in the voices that were denouncing faith and belief. Immorality was widespread in Ephesus; sexual perversions were accepted as an appropriate lifestyle in that city, just as they are in our day. Timothy must have felt that he could make no headway at all against the onrushing tide of evil.

What the apostle does here is roll back the separation between the visible and invisible worlds and show us in whose presence we are laboring, who are the powerful forces observing us and working with us in everything we do and say as Christians. Paul reminds Timothy that he is laboring in the presence of God the Father, the Creator, the One who holds in his hands the life breath of every human being, the One who is Sovereign over all human events.

Timothy is also reminded that he carries on his ministry in the sight of Christ Jesus, the One who is to be the Judge of all men, before whom every human heart is exposed, the One before whom everyone, believer and unbeliever, must ultimately stand and give an account, although not at the same judgment. Jesus himself said that the Father had committed all judgment into his hands. So Timothy carries on his ministry before the One who thoroughly understands all of human history. This is what I hope we capture here in this passage -- a consciousness of who is watching, and before whom we labor.

Not only do we labor in the sight of the Father and the Son, but Paul, in other passages, has told us that believers are called the "theater," the "spectacle" of the universe. In First Corinthians 4 he speaks of himself in that way: "We are made a spectacle before the world, before angels and before men," he says {cf, 1 Cor 4:9}. In Hebrews 12 the writer reminds us that we are surrounded by "a great cloud of witnesses," {Heb 12:1}. In our limited, finite observation of life we often feel like we have been abandoned to labor alone, but we are not.

Furthermore, not only are we being observed and helped by these powerful forces for righteousness in the universe, but we are involved, as Timothy was, with the greatest program the world has ever known. Paul charges Timothy not only in the presence of God and of Christ, but "by his appearing and his kingdom."

Most of the commentators take the phrase, "by his appearing," to refer to the second coming of our Lord. It is true that the word *epiphania*, which is used here (from which we get the English word *epiphany*), is indeed used of the second coming of Christ. There are passages in this letter which look toward that second coming. ("Judge of the living and the dead" is a reference to that event.) But here the word is a reference to the first coming of Jesus. In fact, it is used in that same way in Chapter 1, Verse 10, where the apostle says, "and now has manifested through the appearing of our Savior Christ Jesus, who abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel." Paul is asking Timothy to look back to that first appearing of Jesus, who by his death and resurrection brought life and immortality through the gospel and thus began in that invisible, remarkable way to spread the kingdom of God on earth. By his witness, Timothy is involved in the advance of that greatest of all tasks which God is doing in the world.

That sets things in the right perspective. When we live and work and talk as Christians, we live righteously and justly, we live lovingly and compassionately before man. When we involve ourselves in the hurts of others to speak a word of comfort and relief, and especially when we point men to the Savior who can change their lives, we are involved in this greatest of all human endeavors, in a work that eclipses in significance and importance anything that has ever happened in human history.

I am trying to set forth for us what I have called, *The Majesty of Ministry*. We are doing an extremely significant thing. Jesus taught us to pray, "Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven," {Matt 6:12, Luke 11:2 KJV}. When we are living, speaking and behaving as Christians should, that is what we are doing: We are answering that prayer, we are advancing the kingdom of God, we are causing the will of God to be done on earth as it is done in heaven. There is no higher calling.

In John Pollock's new biography of Billy Graham there is recorded an incident which occurred when Lyndon Johnson was elected President. The President asked Billy, with whom he had been friends for years, what particular position he would like to have in his administration. Without a moment's thought Billy said to him, "Sir, I believe that Jesus Christ has called me to preach his gospel. To me that is the highest calling any man could have on earth." That was an appropriate response. I have always been pleased that Billy Graham has turned aside from many such invitations so that he might maintain the calling to which God has called him. But we must not think of him as being unique in that regard -- every one of us is called to the task of proclaiming the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ.

That is brought out clearly in what Paul goes on to say to Timothy. He reminds him of the most essential element of a Christian witness in a dying world:

Preach the word, he urgent in season and out of season, convince, rebuke, and exhort. Be unfailing in patience and in teaching. {2 Tim 4:2 RSV}

That is the one great essential that must be carried on to fulfill the prayer of our Lord and to advance the kingdom of God, to bring to fulfillment that amazing work that began by his first appearing upon the earth.

When we read the phrase, "preach the word," however, most of us think that this is addressed to preachers like myself, that one has to do this in church, on a platform, or behind a pulpit. I do not like pulpits. I agree with Spurgeon's designation of them as "coward's castles." But I do believe in platforms. They are helpful to elevate one three or four feet above successful contradiction!

No, this word is not addressed to preachers only. It includes all the people of God, for it does not merely mean to preach, the word is really, "announce, proclaim, set it forth, deliver the truth, make it known." It is not something you argue about; you declare it because God himself has said it. This can be done over a cup of coffee, in an office, or in a car while you are driving to work. It is something that can come up any place, anytime. Where human hearts are open, seeking, longing and hurting, there is the place, there is the opportunity to "preach the word."

"Proclaim the good news," Paul says -- and it is good news. It is not news of what we have to do for God. That distortion has been widely peddled across the world and in this country, and it has resulted in a phony Christianity. But that is not the gospel. The gospel is the story of what God has already done for us. That is what ministers to the aching heart. The gospel is the news that God loves us, he pities us, he sees us in our hurt, our agony, our failure and our weakness. The gospel is that he sees us in our strutting boldness and pridefulness and still he loves us. And he has already done something about it -- through the death and the resurrection of Jesus, in that amazing series of events that came through the appearing of Jesus on earth, he broke the stranglehold of evil upon human hearts -- he found a way to set aside his own just sentence of death. Through those who open their hearts to the Savior, he has found a way not only to die for us, but to come and live in us, and start the process of renewing us, remaking us, and restoring us to our lost inheritance. That is the word we are to proclaim. That is the answer we Christians have to the increasingly obvious hurt and heartache of human need all around. It is the most effective thing we can do in our day.

The darker the hour the greater the need for the preaching of the Word. That is to be done by every Christian in every conceivable circumstance of life.

I hope that comes through clearly because this is what the Apostle Paul is seeking to bring to Timothy's mind. Against this impressive background of the watching heavens, and in view of the paramount importance of continuing the redemptive work of Christ, Paul lays this solemn charge on Timothy's heart, as he does upon us: "Proclaim the truth; preach the word."

Then he tells Timothy, and us, how to do it:

1. First, "Be urgent in season and out of season," he says. Urgency means to do it with passion, with a deep belief in our own hearts that this is what is needed. Do not just come to somebody whose life is falling apart, and say, "By the way, I've got something that might help you. Let me see if I can remember it. It's to do with Jesus and the gospel." No, that leaves no impression at all. Rather come with a deep sense of commitment and belief yourself and say, "Let me share with you something that has meant everything to me." Then urgently, earnestly, lay it upon people's hearts, "in season and out of season."

Many have been confused about what that means. Some have taken it to mean that you are to push the gospel on people whether they want it or not -- like the Boy Scout who helped the woman across the street even though she did not want to go. Some Christians take this passage to mean they have the right to impose a witness upon people whether they are ready to hear it or not. But, as John R. W. Stott has wisely said at this point, "This is not a biblical warrant for rudeness, but a biblical appeal against laziness." Do it whether you feel like doing it or not. Do it whether the opportunity seems good or barely feasible. In either case be ready to proclaim the Word. There is nothing else that can set human hearts free. That is why this is central and why, amidst all the other implications and exhortations of Scripture, the apostle singles this one thing out and says to Timothy, "In the light of the presence of God and the significance of the work you are doing, this is the one thing you must not neglect: Proclaim the word of God."

2. Then do it, Paul says, with a variety of approaches. Notice how helpful and practical this is. "Convince, rebuke and exhort," he says. It is rather interesting that those words reflect three different approaches that we can use in announcing the gospel.

"Convince" is a word addressed to the mind -- argue, reason, set it forth in a systematic, reasonable way, answering questions, removing obstacles. Adopt Josh McDowell's approach -- present it as evidence that cannot be confuted. That intellectual approach is perfectly suitable because many people have doubts that need to be answered. All of us should become experts at the reason and logic of the gospel. It is a reasonable, logical explanation of what is going on in the world, for why men act the way they do.

But also there may be some who will need "rebuke." That contemplates someone who has fallen into sin, someone who needs a word that will appeal to the conscience because of sin which is destroying him or her and hurting others, sin which is demolishing, depersonalizing and dehumanizing those involved in it. Sometimes it is necessary to speak a word that points out the evil effects of wrongdoing, a word that seeks to address the conscience to turn away from this so that it no longer spreads evil among humanity. When you do that you are proclaiming the gospel.

Then there are some who need "exhortation," encouragement; they need their wills challenged and encouraged to act. Many people are fearful to try something new, fearful to believe something that they cannot prove. Here is where the approach of encouragement comes in, exhorting them and encouraging their wills to set aside their fears and believe the truth of the gospel. We are to involve ourselves in all of these helpful approaches.

3. Finally, says the apostle, "be unflinching in patience and in teaching" -- patiently keep on teaching. I believe this indicates that Christians ought to beware of pressure tactics that seek to make people act or say they believe when they are not yet really convinced.

Many evangelists and others, unfortunately, have resorted to psychological tricks and gimmicks, pressure tactics to get people to come forward and commit themselves in an emotional movement or mood that does not represent a real commitment of the heart. That is not a part of the gospel approach. The Spirit does move in great convicting power at times, and people respond almost against any attempts to keep them quiet. But we are not to employ pressure tactics to get people to move. Nor are we to abandon those who are slow in responding, but, as the apostle says, we are to keep on explaining; answering questions, clarifying, applying the gospel to specific situations. All of that is the work of teaching.

Notice that the passage begins and ends with an admonition to "Proclaim the truth." State it first, announce it, herald it, proclaim it; and then explain it, teach it, break it down, make it clear. All this, says the apostle, is required, especially as we approach the end, because of the conditions that will obtain at that time. The opening words of Chapter 3 of this letter describe a terrible condition that will come in the church. Then, Paul says, "Men will be lovers of self, lovers of money ... lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, holding the form of religion but denying the power thereof," {cf, 2 Tim 3:2-5}. Clearly, that is in the church.

But here there is described a corresponding condition that will be evident in the world at large. At its base is a dislike of the truth:

The time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own likings, and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander into myths. {2 Tim 4:3-4 RSV}

Surely that is descriptive of our own day. It indicates a time when the general population will forsake what is commonly called 'a Christian consensus,' an undergirding of the institutions of social life by Christian principles, and substitute others. This is the time in which we live: "They will not endure sound teaching." Sound teaching is that which leads to health and wholeness of spirit, soul and body, teaching that permits human beings to live at peace, to develop themselves and enjoy their lives. But, Paul says, men and women will turn away from that and refuse to hear it.

They will do this because truth requires the admission of human weakness, which people do not like to admit; the restraint of passions, which they do not like to do; and submission to the authority of God and other authorities under him, which they dislike and reject. They turn away from the truth, as this indicates; they will not even give it a hearing. It is not that they will listen to the truth and then decide whether it is right or wrong; no, they do not even want to hear it. They do not want you to say anything in this direction, and they resist, sometimes openly, sometimes with subtle influences, every attempt to introduce the truth into any kind of social or governmental situation.

Then, since they will not listen to teachers of truth, as the apostle says, they will look for others who will teach them what they want to hear. There is a disease, widespread in our day, called "itching ear disease," which Paul mentions here. This is an ear that wants to hear a particular line of things, an ear that wants to be entertained, that is always looking for something new, an ear that wants constant affirmation and does not want to hear anything negative or contradictory. People who have this disease look for teachers who will scratch that itch; and the result, the apostle says, is that they "wander into myths."

What do these teachers, which such people accumulate in great numbers, teach? They cannot teach the truth because the truth is unacceptable, so they teach attractive lies, fantasies for the most part, speculative philosophies that emerge from the minds of men which have no basis in fact or history. There are many of these myths abroad today. I do not know all the myths that were taught in Timothy's day, but these errors appear again and again in the course of human history.

Take the myth of reincarnation. Many people, even Christians, believe that lie, that myth which has no basis whatsoever in fact. There is no empirical evidence that can support or substantiate the idea that people die, then come back to earth to live another life, and then die and come back to earth again. That is the myth that says, "If at first you don't succeed, die, die again!" Reincarnation directly contradicts the evidence of revelation. It is diametrically opposite to the biblical teaching of the resurrection of the body, that the body survives life, is changed, and people go on in the same body. Reincarnation says they leave that body, never to enter it again, and come back and take another body. The two are diametrically opposed. You cannot believe in the biblical doctrine of resurrection and also believe in the widespread myth of reincarnation. That is one myth that is taught today to please the itching ears of men who will not believe what the Word of God says about the survival of the body.

Take another myth widespread in our day, the myth of evolution. In the last century, by and large, this myth began to take over the scientific world, again without a shred of empirical evidence to support it. Any attempt to try to set forth anything to the contrary is met with ridicule and mockery, put down as though those who hold any other view are village idiots, incapable of reasoning with intelligent men. Yet I find that many Christians believe the myth of evolution. They do not seem to understand the theological implications which evolution teaches, without any support from science, that our race is descended from apes and other animals so that there never was or could be a fall. By denying the Fall, evolution teaches that there is no need for any redemptive act on the part of God. Why should we need to be redeemed if we have never fallen? That is the theology of the lie of evolution.

Take the lie of human autonomy, which we hear on every side today. We hear that man is the measure of all things; man is the ultimate intelligence in the universe; our destiny is in our own hands; we can and must work out all our own problems; there is nothing more out there. Reflected almost every time you turn on the television, pick up a newspaper or read a magazine is this underlying assumption that man is the measure of all things.

Take the myth of the omniscience of science, that science can solve all our problems. We see pictured in the media unthreatening, very mild-looking doctors and others dressed in white coats, working away in laboratories on the basis of human existence. There, we are told, they are solving problems in the realm of the molecules that make us up, finding new bases of life and secrets of matter, discovering that science can put everything together and bring about a brave new world in which we can live free from fear and free from conflict with one another.

Yet, if you look at the record of scientific achievement, all the technological advances of which we are so proud today have resulted instead in the dehumanization and depersonalization of people, the pollution of our atmosphere, the corruption of our ways of life and the increase in threat to the welfare of the world. That is the record -- it speaks for itself -- yet it is all set aside in

the face of this attractive lie.

Take the matter of homosexuality as an accepted lifestyle. This is being taught and spread everywhere in our society by every means, at every level. We are told that homosexuality can be as satisfying, as enjoyable, as contributive to the life and happiness of a human being as heterosexuality. That is an outright denial of all that God had in mind when he made them in the beginning male and female, and said, "These shall be one flesh," {cf, Gen 2:24}.

We have been saturated by a world that is committed to falsehood. That is why, as Paul sets forth here, we must increasingly proclaim the truth as it is in Jesus. As we see these things abounding around us, the temptation in our day is to start a protest movement, to organize a demonstration, to mindlessly chant slogans, or stage sit-ins. I understand the feelings of frustration that come when we see all that is dear and precious in humanity being destroyed by these lies. We want to seize hold of these things and smash them. But that is not what the Word of God says will work. The apostle reminds us that the most effective thing is, preach the word, announce the truth, tell of reality, make it clear, spread the word. All of heaven is watching, and all of the program of God is committed to blessing, fulfilling and carrying that through until the world at last arrives at the day that God himself has designated, that final end when all creation shall bow together before the Lord Jesus and declare that Jesus is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

You and I are called to advance that work. Do not let anybody tell you that your life as a Christian does not count. It counts tremendously. It is the most significant thing taking place on this earth today, far and away above any international program, act of Congress or decision of president, king or ruler. Glory in what God has called you to do, and be faithful to his command:

- Preach the word;
- Be urgent in season and out of season;
- Convince, rebuke, and exhort;
- Be unfailing in patience and in teaching.

Prayer

Lord, what a calling, you have given to us, and what a world in which to proclaim it! Grant to us that we may not be content with the pabulum that many are issuing today in your name, or fooling around with side issues that do not confront the lies of the enemy at their very source. Grant to us that we will commit ourselves afresh to be purveyors of the truth, preachers of the Word, heralds of the good news that is in Jesus Christ. We ask in his name, Amen.

Title: The Majesty of Ministry
By: Ray C. Stedman
Series: Studies in Second Timothy
Scripture: 2 Tim 4:1-4
Message No: 11
Catalog No: 3792
Date: May 30, 1982

THE PASSING OF THE TORCH

by Ray C. Stedman

This is the time of the year when people are concerned about graduation, the time when seniors move on to bigger and better things, leaving their battered desks, their frustrated teachers, and their schools' academic and athletic honors in someone else's hands. We can all relate to that. All of us remember how thrilled we were when we learned in school that the hypotenuse is equal to the sum of the squares of the other two sides. We could not wait to get out and see if it worked in life.

Yes, graduation is a time when we move out into new things. What an appropriate time to examine the great passage in the fourth chapter of Second Timothy, where the Apostle Paul is looking on to his graduation day. Writing to his young son in the faith, Paul exhorts Timothy to certain endeavors in view of the fact that he must soon take Paul's place. That must have been a frightening prospect to Timothy. But some of us, too, must pass on eventually, and leave the work to others. That is what we have before us in this passage.

In the opening words of Chapter 4, Paul, in rather sobering tones, reminded Timothy that although he was ministering in the pagan city of Ephesus, nevertheless he lived and labored in the full view of heaven, in the very presence of God the Father, and of Christ Jesus, the coming Judge of the living and the dead. In that awesome presence, remembering that heaven is watching -- as it

is watching all that we do as well -- Timothy is to conduct his work.

Timothy is reminded that he was involved in the most significant work taking place on earth during that 1st century time. We too, if we are Christians, are doing the most significant work taking place in this 20th century today. We are involved in the great enterprises of God, advancing the Kingdom, and completing the foundational work began by our Lord himself in his death and resurrection.

Timothy is also reminded that he must do this because there was very shortly coming a time when truth would seem to disappear from the earth, when error would seem to be triumphant, when men would give themselves to myths and fables which they would follow to their own destruction. We ourselves live in just such an age. This is a time when truth is disappearing, when it is no longer recognized as the fundamental base of social and governmental life, when we too find people following wrong ideas, myths, legends and imaginative fantasies of the human mind which lead them to their own destruction. Because we live in such a time, we need the same encouragement to faith that Timothy needed.

The apostle summarizes this for us in Verse 5 of Chapter 4:

As for you, always be steady, endure suffering, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry. {2 Tim 4:5 RSV}

That really is a summary of many things Paul has said to Timothy through the course of these two letters. These words gather up in very brief form all that he is expecting Timothy to do.

Notice the first thing: "Be steady," Paul says, i.e., be consistent, do not be up one day and down the next, do not be off and on in your Christian commitment. Steadiness always comes from a firm base. Here the apostle is exhorting Timothy to rest upon that firm foundation which will result in a consistent, steady life amidst all the pressures and the countering forces of any day or age.

Surely this is a word we need to hear today. Timothy was exhorted to "be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus," {2 Tim 2:1}.

What is your base? We have to ask ourselves every day whether we are resting upon that foundation. Do we have fellowship with the Lord? Are we in communication with him in prayer? Are we learning more of his mind and thinking through his Word? Are we saturating our thoughts with his thoughts so that we think Christianly about life? That should be our base -- resting upon the relationship we have with a Living Lord who is with us to steady us, to succor us, to help us through times of pressure and danger, to impart to us the wisdom and power we need to live today.

The second thing Paul says to Timothy is, "endure suffering." This has been a frequent theme in this letter. Paul has talked many times about the difficulties and the persecutions that Christians may have to face. He has already exhorted Timothy to "endure hardness as a good soldier of Christ Jesus," (2 Tim 2:3). That is a clear answer to the idea being widely taught today that, when you become a Christian, God smooths everything out for you, that he protects you from all problems and dangers, and does not let you suffer any disappointments. Scripture stands solidly against that. As in this case, Scripture exhorts us to endure hardness, to endure suffering. We used to sing a hymn that asks the question,

Am I a soldier of the cross,
a follower of the Lamb?
And shall I fear to own His cause
or blush to speak His name?
Must I be carried to the skies
on flowery beds of ease,
While others fought to win the prize
and sailed through bloody seas?

Many Christians feel that way today, that something is wrong if they have any trouble, any difficulty in their life. But the apostle faithfully reminds us that there will be trouble, that those who seek to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution. The reason, of course, is that Christianity is a counter-culture movement; it is against the trend of the day and the spirit of the age. If we are going to live in faithfulness to what we believe, then we will experience some rejections, some difficulties, some pressure, and even some persecution. That hymn goes on to say,

Sure I must fight, if I would reign;
increase my courage, Lord;
I'll bear the toil, endure the pain,
supported by Thy Word.

That is the Christian life.

The third thing the apostle says to Timothy is, "Do the work of an evangelist."

For a long time, I confess, I thought that that was Paul's identification of Timothy's spiritual gift. But I have had to change my mind on that. An evangelist is one who has a special gift and skill in speaking to non-Christians and leading them to Christ, but I find nothing in these letters to Timothy to confirm that that was Timothy's gift. He apparently was a rather timid young man, fearful, inclined to keep to himself. Paul has to urge him to mix with others, to face public life, etc. Rather it appears Timothy had the gift of a pastor-teacher; he seems to fit that mold much better. The apostle gives him several instructions as to how to exercise that gift in the churches of Ephesus.

But why then does Paul say, "Do the work of an evangelist?" He does so because all the gifts must ultimately be directed to the world as well as to the church. The church is in this world in order to teach it the truth about life and about God, and to offer to the world the good news about forgiveness and healing in Jesus' name. That is the work of the church -- to reach the world.

I am thrilled about the new ministry the Lindstedts have undertaken of reaching out to refugees from Southeast Asia. These refugees come from Buddhist backgrounds, and from other faiths, they cannot even speak English, and yet laid on this couple's hearts is a concern to reach them and to teach them. That is not necessarily the gift of an evangelist, but it is doing the work of an evangelist, using the gifts that we have. This is the thrust of the apostle's reminder to Timothy. We are to reach out to the waiting world around.

Finally, Paul says, "fulfill your ministry." He means by that, do not quit until the end, keep on until you have done all that the Lord has sent you to do. You have reached that time when the Lord takes you home; that is the end of your ministry.

I have always been sensitive about the word retirement. I do not like it. When I suggested a couple of years ago that I might be changing my base of operations from Palo Alto to southern Oregon, the word went out that I was retiring. Everywhere I travel around the country now, somebody will say to me, "How are you enjoying your retirement?" No, I am not retired, and I hope I never do retire in that sense. Although it is perfectly proper for those who grow older -- which I perhaps will some day -- to slow down a bit, and take time to do other things, we must never forget that we have a ministry until we die. Our ministry is to be a Christian, to live as a Christian, to walk and talk as a Christian wherever we are, whatever we do.

In the 20th chapter of Acts it is recorded that, when Paul was in Ephesus, several years before he wrote this last letter, he himself prayed with the Ephesian elders and said to them these words about himself,

I do not account my life of any value nor as precious to myself, if only I may accomplish my course and fulfill the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God. {cf, Acts 20:24 RSV}

That was said several years before this letter was written. Paul thought then that he was about to reach the end of his life. And it is true -- when he went up to Jerusalem he was arrested, put in prison and eventually taken to Rome. From there, some years later, he writes to Timothy and urges him to stay with it to the end. That is the test of reality in the Christian life. Anybody can look well for a while, but it is those who endure to the end, those who manifest the basic change of their hearts that they are born again, who have possessed the life of Jesus.

So the apostle urges Timothy to fulfill his ministry. He does so because, as he goes on to say, in effect, "You must take my place."

For I am already on the point of being sacrificed; the time of my departure has come. {2 Tim 4:6 RSV}

The clear implication is that Paul is passing the torch on to this younger man. Timothy would never be an apostle. He was a representative of Paul in Ephesus. The Word of God being written down, the New Testament was rapidly taking the place of the apostles in the world, so Timothy would never fill the shoes of an apostle. But he was nevertheless to carry on the apostolic ministry, as all of us are also called to do.

The end has come for Paul. In these famous words he describes his view of his own death and of what lies beyond. "I am already," he says, "on the point of being sacrificed. The time of my departure has come":

I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to me on that Day, and not only to me but also to all who have loved his appearing. {2 Tim 4:7-8 RSV}

What wonderful words! We all thrill as we read them, hoping that some day we can say them of ourselves.

Notice the way the apostle uses two interesting words to describe his outlook on death: "I am on the point of being sacrificed" (it has, in a sense, already begun); and, "the time of my departure has come."

The "sacrifice" is a reference to the drink offering which in the Jewish feasts terminated the great Day of Atonement. At the end of all the offerings, a drink offering, a jug of wine, was poured out upon the altar. Paul sees himself in that way. Perhaps he knows that he is about to be beheaded. That was the Roman method of execution for those who were Roman citizens. Others were crucified, but citizens had the right to be beheaded if they were to be executed. So Paul, according to tradition, was taken out and had his head laid on a block and an executioner with an axe or a sword severed his head. Paul saw the pouring out of his blood as a drink offering.

He seems to have no regrets at all about this. He does not view it as a disaster, a thing to be feared. He sees it as a normal outcome of the kind of life he lived, a sacrificial life so to be poured out as a sacrifice is a fitting conclusion.

I do not know whether I should add this personal note, but I have always thought that being beheaded would be a wonderful way to die as a Christian. There is an audience present, and one is the center of attention. The end is very quick, relatively painless, and conclusive. It seems to me to be a wonderful way to go home to glory. I do not think Paul looked toward this with any dread whatsoever, but with expectation and thankfulness that his death could be like his ministry, a pouring out of himself on behalf of others.

The second word Paul employs is one that is used of soldiers when they pull up their tent-stakes and leave. The word is also used in Greek literature of a ship that looses its moorings and sets out to sea. Surely that is the most beautiful figure the apostle could employ: "The time of my loosing has come." He will be set free from earthly ties to sail out on a new adventure in life. What a wonderful view of death that is! There is no fear on the apostle's part, no regrets over his termination as a sacrifice, but a sense of adventure as he sails out into a new experience of life with Christ. "To depart and to be with Christ ... is far better," he says in Philippians {Phil 1:23}.

Then Paul uses three phrases which sum up his life's accomplishments. What would you say about your life if you were looking back and summing up in brief words what had been accomplished?

Here are the apostle's words:

First, he says, "I have fought the good fight." It is very important to see he did not say, "I have fought *a* good fight," as he is often quoted as saying. If he had said that it would be indicative of his view of how well he had done. It would be boasting: "I've fought a good fight. I've pitched in there and done the right thing." But that is not what he says. He says, "I have fought *the* good fight," i.e., the significant fight, the great battle which life had presented to him.

Paul sees that battle as the one he describes so vividly in Ephesians 6: "We wrestle not," he says, "against flesh and blood [people are not basically our problem] but with principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places," {Eph 6:12 KJV}. In other words, Paul sees himself as having been grappling with these malevolent, clever, deceitful beings who are constantly at work in human life to interject lies and attractive fantasies to delude us, deceive us, and to lead us into sin. That is where his battling has been going on. And it is not merely a mind trip. It is something that involved the apostle in persecution, in beatings and stonings, in hardships. But it is all part of the battle, and now he has finished it.

Paul sees it as having been a tough, hard fight, but at last he has reached the end. "I have fought the good fight," he says.

I am sure most of you are saying to yourselves, "I hope I can say that when I get to the end." Yes, life is a battle against invisible forces, clever, malicious masters of human psychology who know how to manipulate us, deceive us, twist us and lead us into destruction. That is the battle we are facing.

Paul says, "I have finished the race." That is another common figure in his writings. In Philippians 3 he describes that race: "Forgetting what lies behind, and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus," he says {Phil 3:13b-14 RSV}.

The race, of course, is the Christian life itself, which is lived moment-by-moment, just as a race is run step-by-step. The question is whether you live each step in the flesh or in the Spirit, whether you are walking in the power of the new life you have from Christ, or whether you are still running in the old ways of thinking, the old self-centered, fleshly, self-serving attitudes. Every moment is either contributing to reaching the goal for the prize or delaying it, wasting time in the flesh. Christians are called to run that race.

The goal is the end of the race -- the death of the believer. Paul has reached that goal. That is why he says, "I have finished the

race. I have come to the end." The prize, which he mentions in Philippians 3, is the new body, the resurrected life, the glory that awaits. (He will say more about that in a moment.) The hope of every Christian is that he is not running vainly, not running to get through life, collect his Social Security and take a cruise around the world, but that he might fulfill his ministry, finish the race, and receive the prize which is the glory that awaits him.

Third, the apostle says, "I have kept the faith." He means by that the whole body of truth that is involved in the gospel, what he calls in First Corinthians, "That secret and hidden wisdom of God," {1 Cor 2:7a RSV}. This wisdom is totally different from the wisdom of this world. It is the truth that God tells us about ourselves and about himself, about this world and why it is the way it is. It is the truth about the power of evil, "the mystery of lawlessness" {2 Th 2:7 RSV}, and about "the mystery of godliness" {1 Tim 3:16 KJV} with which we can counteract evil. That is the faith which Paul is talking about. On the very edge of eternity he can say of himself, "I have kept the faith. I have not lost any of the good deposit which God has entrusted to me." He has guarded it as a treasure, and he tells Timothy in turn to "guard the good deposit which has been entrusted to you," {cf, 2 Tim 1:14 RSV}. Paul has kept this treasure from being mistreated or distorted by those who would try to twist it and use it for their own purposes. He has answered its critics. He has warned those who would take it astray, as he does in this very letter, thus he has "kept the faith."

Finally, Paul has dispensed it freely to all. That is God's purpose in giving us this great treasure. Paul says, "I have not shunned to declare unto you the whole counsel of God" -- all the truth that is hidden from the world. Here is where the secrets of life are really found. He ought to be imparting it to everybody with whom we can gain a hearing, helping them to understand themselves and this crazy mixed-up world, the course of history, and the reason for the pressures we are going through. That is the faith which has been imparted to us. I am sure all of you would love to come to that kind of a graduation day where you too can say, "I have fought the good fight; I have finished the race; I have kept the faith."

Paul now describes in four aspects his expectations at this moment in his life:

Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to me on that Day, and not only to me but also to all who have loved his appearing. {2 Tim 4:8 RSV}

First, "the crown of righteousness." This is easily misunderstood. Some people have taken this to mean that Paul is not going to be made righteous until he appears before the Lord at this great Day of award. But that is not what this means. Paul has already been made righteous. You cannot read the book of Romans without seeing that the gift of God is righteousness, which is given by faith in Jesus Christ. God makes us righteous at the beginning, not at the end, of our Christian life. So Paul is not waiting for righteousness. Rather he is waiting for the crown, the manifestation of authority and glory, which accompanies righteousness, which is its natural manifestation.

Paul describes that very vividly in other places in terms of the word *glory*. In Second Corinthians 4:17, he says, "This light affliction, which is but for a moment, is laying up for me an eternal weight of glory." That is the crown of which he speaks. Peter says that elders who serve faithfully will be given "a crown of glory" {1 Pet 5:4} when they see the Lord. This is the crown that accompanies righteousness. Righteousness is glorious. God is a glorious Being because he is a righteous Being. So righteousness is the secret of glory. But in this present life that awaits us; we have the righteousness hidden within, but the glory is not visible. That is why John can say, "It does not yet appear what we shall be, but we know that when he shall appear, we shall be like him for we shall see him as he is," {1 Jn 3:2 RSV}. That is the crown of glory that awaits -- the resurrected body, the house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.

That is unbelievable, indescribable.

These passages always intrigue me when I try to think through what it will mean to have a new body, totally responsive to my spirit, able to do or go or be anywhere at any time, any place, instantly, without difficulty. I will be able to do things I always dreamed of doing -- sing with a tremendous tenor voice that will make the heavens ring, and hit a golf ball 5,000 miles straight as an arrow down the universe! No, I do not know what it means really, but Paul says there is awaiting him an indescribable weight of glory.

This is to be given him, Paul says, "by the Lord himself, the righteous judge." That last phrase is an intended contrast with Paul's expectation of his forthcoming appearance before Nero, the unrighteous judge, who, after examining this righteous man will nevertheless pronounce him guilty and condemn him to death. But that judgment before the Emperor will shortly be reversed by the Lord himself, who, knowing everything about Paul, will hand him the award, the crown of glory, because he is a righteous man by faith in Jesus Christ.

What a wonderful thing it will be to have the Lord himself hand to us, with the pierced hands that were broken for us, the glory for which we have been waiting all our life. I do not know anything more intriguing than that. This glory is the proper clothing for a spirit that has been made like our Lord's himself, so we share with him that glory.

It is to be given, says Paul, "on that Day." In that indefinite, vague expression, which Scripture frequently uses, there is a reference to the one far off, supreme event toward which God is moving all creation. "That Day" is the day when all that is now invisible to man, realities which cannot be discovered by the scientific mind, will be made visible, and all the earth will see what has been there all along. That is the great Day toward which we are moving, a moment when time gives way to eternity, when all the waiting ends, when "time shall be no more," as the book of Revelation says {cf, Rev 10:6 KJV}. We will no longer be locked into having to wait for something to happen. In eternal conditions there is no waiting. All that we are ready for, all that we are spiritually equipped to handle is given to us. That may be difficult for us to work out in terms of our time-space mentality, nevertheless it is true. Surely this is what our Lord meant when he said those wonderful words, "Let not your heart be troubled," {John 14:1a}. "If I go away I will come again and receive you unto myself that where I am there you may be also," {cf, John 14:3 KJV}. That is the Day of which the apostle speaks.

Finally, it is to be shared with others. It is not Paul himself who will have this, but, as he says, "Not only to me but also to all who have loved his appearing." Most of the commentators take this to refer to the second coming of Jesus, and for a long time I too thought that. But, in carefully working through this letter, I do not think that that is what Paul means. Some Christians today are not looking forward to the Lord's second coming; some of them are so confused in their eschatology they do not understand the prophetic Scriptures, nor do they even make an effort to do so. Does this passage mean that only those who are eagerly looking for the Lord are going to be given a crown of glory? No, I know many Christians who do not look for the Lord yet they love him deeply. This is referring to the Lord's first appearing, what we read earlier in this letter, "the appearing of our Savior Jesus Christ, who abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel," {cf, 2 Tim 1:10 KJV}. That is why Paul uses the glory, past tense here, "who have loved his appearing."

Do you love his appearing? I am sure, if you are a Christian at all, your heart responds "Yes!" You love the story of Jesus, of his moving about among men, healing the sick, raising the dead, ministering to the heartbroken, touching the empty, lonely lives around him, bringing them to life, vitality, joy and peace; the story of the mystery of the cross, the darkness of it, the strange transgressions that were laid upon him there; the glory of the resurrection, the ministry with the disciples, the story of the ascension, the coming of the Spirit so that Jesus can be with each one of us individually no matter where we are on earth or in time. Do you love that story?

Tell me the old, old story
of unseen things above,
Of Jesus and His glory,
of Jesus and His love.
Tell me the story simply,
as to a little child;
For I am weak and weary,
and helpless and defiled.

If you feel that way, as I do, there is nothing you love better than the story of Jesus' appearing, of the relief he brings to the spirit, the lifting of the load of guilt, the healing of the inner life. All this, Paul says, will occur at that one Day.

All God's people arrive together. That is the mystery of eternity. I know it is hard for us to grasp, but I am convinced that many Scriptures indicate there is no waiting once we depart this earth. Resurrection bodies which lie in the grave for centuries in time are immediately ours in eternity. There is no waiting around in a kind of heavenly bathrobe, waiting for your good clothes to get back from the cleaners. We are with the Lord.

When I go to be with the Lord, I expect to see Wesley and all the rest arriving at the same time, all of us coming together.

"Not to me only, but unto all those who have loved his appearing," Paul says. What a hope that is! The Christian life is entirely different than anything the world has to offer. It is not a mere philosophy of being good to your fellow man. It includes that, but that is not all of it. It is not merely good teaching about some of the intricate mysteries of life, about what happens after death, whether there is a heaven or a hell. It is the whole pattern centered on one Person, the Lord Jesus. He is the One who is the heart, the soul and glory of our Christian faith. The one thing we ought to expect more than anything else is the fulfillment of those promises that we shall be conformed to the image of God's Son.

I love those words in the hymn, *The Sands of Time Are Sinking* :

The bride eyes not her garment,
but her dear Bridegroom's face.
I will not gaze at glory
but on my King of grace.
Not at the crown He giveth,
but on his pierced hands,

For the Lamb is all the glory
of Emmanuel's land.

That was Paul's expectation. How it ought to undergird our own hearts!

It has been said of Christianity that it is pie-in-the-sky-by-and-by. But let me tell you something: If you do not have the hope of glory you have nothing to nerve your endeavor and stimulate you now. If you do not have the expectation that God is working out great purposes in which you will have a part, your life will be cold, dead, lifeless and nerveless at this present time. It is the hope that we have that stimulates us and steadies us. May God help us to always be steady, to endure suffering, to do the work of an evangelist, and to fulfill our ministry.

Prayer

Lord, we thank you for these encouraging words from the mighty apostle's heart. How they do steady us as we think about them and relate ourselves to them. Thank you for showing us that we too can live triumphantly in this present world. We ask it in Jesus' name, Amen.

Title: The Passing of the Torch
By: Ray C. Stedman
Series: Studies in Second Timothy
Scripture: 2 Tim 4:5-8
Message No: 12
Catalog No: 3793
Date: June 6, 1982

THE END OF THE ROAD

by Ray C. Stedman

Last week I was in San Antonio, Texas, teaching all of the Apostle Paul's thirteen letters in one week to a group of teaching leaders for Bible Study Fellowship. It was a great experience again for me to go through these fantastic theological explanations of the redemptive program of God, as they came through the mighty heart and mind of this great apostle.

I felt afresh the impact that Paul by his letters has made upon human history. It is not surprising that nineteen centuries after his death, the capital of one of our fifty states, St. Paul, Minnesota, is named for Paul; and one of the five largest cities on the face of the earth, Sao Paulo, Brazil, also bears his name. Innumerable schools, colleges, societies and institutions have been named for this great apostle. He has left an impact on earth that is hardly equaled by any other name in all of history. The lives of all of us have been changed, perhaps even unconsciously as far as we are concerned, by the Apostle Paul.

Yet this last letter that comes from his hand, Second Timothy, finds him in a dank prison in Rome. He is cold, lonely, and sometimes bored, yet he is full of faith, confident in the Lord, without regrets for the past. He is aware, as he himself put it, that he has "fought the good fight," he has "finished the race," he has "kept the faith," {2 Tim 4:7}. He is looking on eagerly to that wonderful day when he will be with the Lord.

Bold I approach th' eternal throne,
and claim the crown, through Christ my own.

That is what the apostle is saying in this letter.

We sense Paul's deep loneliness in the final instructions he gives to Timothy, his son in the faith, found in Second Timothy 4, beginning with Verse 9:

Do your best to come to me soon. For Demas, in love with this present world, has deserted me and gone to Thessalonica; Crescens has gone to Galatia, Titus to Dalmatia. Luke alone is with me. Get Mark and bring him with you; for he is very useful in serving me. Tychicus I have sent to Ephesus. {2 Tim 4:9-12 RSV}

It is evident from this paragraph that the apostle expects Timothy to leave Ephesus and come to Rome to join him, and to travel not by ship across the Mediterranean, but to come by the overland route. This would take him north from Ephesus across the Hellespont into Macedonia; then he would take the Egnatian Road, the great Roman Highway, crossing the Greek Peninsula down to the eastern shores of the Adriatic Sea; then another short voyage across to the heel of the boot of Italy, from where he would

then proceed by land across the Italian mountains to Rome. Paul expects Timothy to come quickly. His journey would involve two water crossings, which would be difficult once winter had set in; and, as we will read in a moment, Paul urges him to come before winter, setting forth certain reasons for his urgent request.

One reason was that Demas, who had been Paul's fellow worker, had forsaken him. With obvious pain and heartache, Paul gives the reason for this -- Demas was "in love with this present age," he says. Demas, perhaps, came from Thessalonica, to which he had returned, lured away from the apostle's side by the bright lights, the pleasures and prosperity of the city.

Perhaps Demas grew tired of the poverty, persecution, and hardship he had to endure as a companion of Paul, and, "in love with this present age," he had abandoned him. We can quite properly read into this much heartache on the part of Paul. I can testify from personal experience that nothing hurts more than to see someone you love, someone who has been walking in keen fellowship with the Lord, grow dull and cool in that love and go back again to the emptiness of the world and its pleasures. This is what has happened to Demas.

William Barclay, the great Scottish commentator, suggests that there may be some reason to believe, however, that Demas later returned to fellowship with the Lord. He points out that the name Demas is a nickname for Demetrius, and that there are two Demetriuses mentioned in Scripture. One was the silversmith in Ephesus who led the riot, recorded in the eighteenth chapter of Acts, that threatened the apostle's life. There is at least a slight suggestion that he may have been converted because of that encounter and became the Demas who accompanied Paul on some of his journeys. Paul refers to him in the letter to Philemon as, "my fellow laborer." Now that his love has cooled, however, Demas has returned to Thessalonica, where he perhaps originally came from, turning away, at least, from a forthright Christian testimony.

But in the letters of John, who wrote somewhat later than Paul, another Demetrius is mentioned. This man seems to be a very responsible, dependable Christian. Barclay suggests that this, perhaps, is the whole story of Demas; that he began as a pagan and an idol worshipper, was converted, accompanied the apostle, then drifted back into the world for a while, but eventually God reached him again and turned him around, and he ended his life as a respected believer.

I would add that that is highly speculative, however. There is very little evidence for that. As far as we know, this is the last picture we have of Demas. He stands for those heartbreaking cases who have begun well, who seem to hold forth much promise of faithfulness in Christ, but drift back again into the empty pleasures and commerce of the world, lose their Christian testimony, and nothing further is heard of them. This was a great heartbreak to the apostle; he writes these words with a tremendous sense of loss.

Crescens is mentioned as going to Galatia. The fact that he was sent by the apostle to these fickle and easily influenced Galatians, to whom the letter to the Galatians was written, indicates that he was probably a very trustworthy servant of Christ who could help these people in their struggles and problems.

Titus is a name we are familiar with; another of the pastoral letters is written to him. He is another whom Paul calls, "my own son." Titus was the test case, the focus of attention at the Council of Jerusalem, when the question arose as to whether he, a Greek, would need to be circumcised in order to live as a Christian. Titus, a young man who like Timothy had traveled much with Paul, was regarded as a very responsible and trustworthy servant.

Then Paul adds, "only Luke is with me." Faithful Luke, the beloved physician, had doubtless cared for Paul's "thorn in the flesh," which was probably a repetitive physical weakness. The fact that Luke was here in Rome in the last days of the apostle's life indicates something. Again, William Barclay says that it was a Roman custom that when a citizen was being taken to Rome for trial he was permitted to take two slaves with him. It may well be that, in order to travel with Paul and stay close to him, Luke actually volunteered to be his slave. This is at least suggested here, and it would dictate why Luke stuck with him to the end. What a faithful heart he proved to be.

Mark is another name familiar to all who know the New Testament. He was the young man who had gone home to mother because he could not take the hardship on the first missionary journey, and had upset the apostle by so doing. It is a tribute to Mark that he had somehow recovered himself in the apostle's eyes. Tradition tells us that he went down to Egypt and so ministered in the Christian community there that he won a position of respect. Later, Paul had him come to Rome with him, as we learn from one of the prison epistles. Now he is back in Ephesus, and Paul asks Timothy to bring Mark with him because, as he puts it, "he is very useful in serving me." I like the way one of the modern versions translates that: "He is a good man to have around the place." It is a tribute to him that he recovered himself, and a tribute to Paul that he found the grace to forgive and forget the weakness of the past and give him another chance.

Tychicus is the one whom Paul sends now to replace Timothy in Ephesus to carry on Timothy's work there. He is the one who also was the bearer of the letters to the Colossians and the Ephesians. He was well known in this area of Central Asia, so he would be a faithful replacement for Timothy.

We get Paul's further instructions to Timothy in Verse 13 and following:

When you come, bring the cloak that I left with Carpus at Troas, also the books, and above all the parchments. Alexander the coppersmith did me great harm; the Lord will requite him for his deeds. Beware of him yourself, for he strongly opposed our message. {2 Tim 4:13-15 RSV}

It seems very likely that Paul was re-arrested by the Roman authorities in Troas. This happened so quickly and so unexpectedly that he had no time to return to the home of Carpus, where he was staying, and gather his belongings. Paul was dragged off, probably while Timothy looked on, the tears streaming down his face, as Paul said in Chapter 1 of this letter, "I remember your tears at our parting," {cf, 2 Tim 1:4 RSV}. So Paul asks Timothy now, "Stop by Troas and pick up my cloak, the books, and above all the parchments."

The cloak was what we today would call a poncho, a circular garment with a hole in the middle for the head, made of very warm material that Paul would doubtless need for the coming cold winter in Rome. "The books" would seem to be a reference to papyrus books. They could well be the early Gospels of Mark and Matthew, which perhaps were circulating by now. The parchments most certainly were copies of the Old Testament Scriptures. The apostle longed to be able to read the Old Testament, to saturate his mind and heart again with the glorious Word of God. Notice how he stresses that, "Above all bring the parchments." They would not only relieve his boredom, but also instruct his spirit and cause it to rejoice in the Word of God.

It seems likely that since the apostle goes on to connect all of this with his trouble with Alexander the coppersmith that this is the man who probably betrayed him into the hands of the Romans. "He did me great harm," Paul says; he opposed Paul's message. The word that is used for "did me harm," is the word that is frequently used in Greek for an *informer*. If this is the same Alexander who is mentioned in the first letter to Timothy -- there he is linked with the name Hymenaeus, and of both of them the apostle says, "I have delivered them to Satan that they may learn not to blaspheme" -- there would be supplied a motive for Alexander's deliberate attempt to hurt the apostle by betraying him to the Roman authorities. Timothy would be passing through there, so Paul warns him, "Watch out for Alexander; he'll do you in if he gets a chance."

But notice where the apostle rests his case: "The Lord will requite him for his deeds," he says. There is no urging Timothy to try to get even with Alexander for Paul's sake, or any attempt on Paul's part to call down curses on this man's head. Rather Paul obeys his own injunction in Romans 12, reminding himself that the Lord has said, "Vengeance is mine; I will repay," {Rom 12:19}. There is an excellent example of how to deal with those who mistreat us.

Then we get a report on the situation in Rome. Verse 16:

At my first defense no one took my part; all deserted me. May it not be charged against them! But the Lord stood by me and gave me strength to proclaim the word fully, that all the Gentiles might hear it. So I was rescued from the lion's mouth. The Lord will rescue me from every evil and save me for his heavenly kingdom. To him be the glory for ever and ever. Amen. {2 Tim 4:16-18 RSV}

Here is rather a sad note. When the apostle was brought up for his hearing -- we would call it the arraignment of the charges against him -- no one stood up for him; all forsook him. This was a very dangerous time in Rome. The Emperor Nero was noted for his vindictiveness. If anybody even appeared to be against him, Nero's assassins were all throughout the city, ready to take the man's life. Evidently no Christian was ready to risk his life by standing up for Paul, so he had to face this preliminary hearing all alone. But notice again Paul's lack of vindictiveness. "May it not be charged against them," he says; and he prays for those who forsook him in the hour of danger.

Actually, the fact that no one stood up for the apostle could have led to his immediate execution. But that did not happen because, as Paul says, "The Lord stood by me." He is the One on whom you can always count. Hebrews 13 tells us that God has promised, "I will never, never, ever, under any conditions (there are six Greek negatives thrown in there) leave you nor forsake you," {Heb 13:5}. The writer's response is, "What, then, can man do unto me?" {cf, Heb 13:6}. This too is Paul's experience.

The presence of Jesus with him and beside him, Paul says, accomplished two things:

First, it "gave him strength to testify." I wish we could all have looked in on that scene as this doughty apostle told the story of his own conversion. Paul is doing what he told Timothy to do in this very letter: "Preach the word in season and out of season, and faithfully set forth the truth," {cf, 2 Tim 4:2}. The Lord gave him the strength to do that.

Second, Paul says, "He delivered me from the lion's mouth." Some have read that to mean that Paul was afraid he was going to be thrown to the lions in the Roman Coliseum. The problem with that, however, is that the Coliseum was not built until three or four years later. Also, because Paul was a Roman citizen, the law required that he could not be executed by being thrown to the lions. He was facing death by beheading.

The "lion" here is very likely a reference to Satan, the malevolent schemer behind all the false charges that were laid against Paul, the one who had weakened the courage of the Christians so they dared not stand up along with the apostle. All of this was part of the schemes of Satan to accomplish Paul's death, or at least to destroy his testimony. Peter's warning, "Your enemy the devil goes about as a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour" {cf, 1 Pet 5:8}, is still true today. Much of the problems and unexplainable difficulties that suddenly complicate all the things we are trying to do for the Lord are only part of the activities of the lion who is seeking to devour our faith, to destroy us and weaken our testimony for Christ.

But Paul was delivered from the lion's mouth. In this beautiful verse, he expresses his feeling that he is safe in the Lord's hands. Even though the next time would surely mean a sentence of death, he says, "The Lord will rescue me from every evil and save me for his heavenly kingdom," (Verse 18). Nero may put him to death on earth, but that will not in any way remove him from the kingdom of heaven and the opportunity to be with the Lord; in fact, it only will open the door for him.

We get Paul's final greetings in this last paragraph:

Greet Prisca and Aquila, and the household of Onesiphorus. Erastus remained at Corinth; Trophimus I left ill at Miletus. Do your best to come before winter. Eubulus sends greetings to you, as do Pudens and Linus and Claudia and all the brethren. {2 Tim 4:19-21 RSV}

We have seen some of these names before. Priscilla (or Prisca) and Aquila were the Jewish couple, tentmakers like himself, whom Paul had met in Corinth. Every time they appear in Scripture they have a church meeting in their home. They had a church in Corinth; then they moved with Paul to Ephesus and had a church in their home there; they went to Rome, and, in the letter to the Romans, Paul refers to the church in their home there. Now they are back in Ephesus, evidently, and undoubtedly carrying on a church in their home.

Paul greets the family of Onesiphorus, who had ministered to him so refreshingly while he was a prisoner in Rome, but who now, apparently, is still away from his family. Erastus, we learn from the letter to the Romans, was the city treasurer of Corinth, so it would make sense that he had remained there in order to carry on his business.

"Trophimus," Paul says, "I left ill at Miletus." This is a remarkable word, because if we are to believe many of the faith healers of our day it is absolutely wrong for a Christian ever to be ill. It is because of a lack of faith, they say. If that is so, why then does Paul leave Trophimus ill, especially when as an apostle he had had remarkable demonstrations of the ability to heal the sick? The fact that he does not heal Trophimus is very clear evidence that God does not always choose to allow his people to be well. This is one of several Scriptures that must be dealt with in this idea that is so widely proposed today that Christians have no business being sick. Paul himself had a "thorn in the flesh" {1 Cor 12:7}, and here he leaves a companion ill. (Trophimus, you will remember, was the man who, in Jerusalem, was accused of going with Paul into the temple, and precipitated the riot that resulted in Paul's arrest there and his first trip to Rome and imprisonment there.)

Then we have a mention of Eubulus, of whom we know nothing. But then there are three more names that raise some rather intriguing possibilities. Pudens and Linus and Claudia are all Roman Christians who greet the brothers in Ephesus. Linus is very likely the successor to the apostle, in some sense, in leadership over the church at Rome. Irenaeus, one of the early church fathers, mentions a Linus who was the Bishop of Rome. He, very likely, was the same man.

Since his name appears between that of Pudens and Claudia, it is thought that perhaps he is the son of a couple, Pudens being a male name and Claudia a female name. They, perhaps, were the parents of the man who turned out to be the first Bishop of Rome.

This is also supported by the Roman historian Tacitus, who in his writings refers to a noble Roman named Pudens, who had married a princess, the daughter of a British king Tiberius Claudius Cogidubnus. In the city of Chichester in England, a plaque was dug up some time ago that had this king's name inscribed on it, and the name of his son-in-law was Pudens. So there has been some secular confirmation of this.

Although we do not know this for sure, this king likely named his daughter Claudia, since his own name was Tiberius Claudius (after Claudius, the Emperor), and sent her to Rome, which was the custom of the kings who fell under the rule of the Empire, to guarantee that the treaty of relationship would be carried out. If we put all that together it sounds very much as though Claudia came to Rome, met Pudens, married him there, and they became Christians. Thus we have here at the close of this letter to Timothy a tie with British Christianity, from which eventually American Christianity largely came.

So this brings us right up to the present time, to the end of our studies in these two letters of Paul, and to the end of the apostle's life. It is intriguing to wonder whether Timothy ever made it to Rome. He may have. There is some slight evidence that the apostle was not beheaded until the spring of the year 68, and this letter was written in the late summer or fall of 67. If Timothy had made it to Rome before that time he could have spent several months with his beloved teacher. Paul would have had the

comfort of his presence during the closing months of his life.

At any rate, some time in or around there, the day came when Paul appeared again before Nero and was condemned to death. He was led out on the Ostian Way, he placed his head on the executioner's block, the axe flashed in the sun, and Paul found himself at that great Day when the Lord himself gave him the crown of glory, and along with him all people from all ages and time who have come to love the appearing of Jesus.

What a wonderful close to a marvelous life! How much the world owes to this mighty apostle; how much we owe to him. How he has taught us, instructed us and guided us!

I am sure that one of the first things we will do when we get to glory is to thank him for his faithful ministry, to which we are all indebted.

Paul's final word to Timothy is a most important word to all of us:

The Lord be with your spirit. {2 Tim 4:22a RSV}

That is the foundation of life, the rock upon which all else must be built: the union of our spirit with the Lord's Spirit to make us new persons in Christ.

The daily supply that we need to encourage, strengthen and feed that union is grace, the daily grace of our Lord.

So Paul concludes,

Grace be with you. {2 Tim 4:22b RSV}

"Grace be with you" in these pressure-filled times when we, like Timothy, are called to keep the faith in dark days, and to stand for the truth amidst the pressures of life.

Prayer

Lord, we feel the challenge to our own hearts to be dedicated, responsible, trustworthy men and women who are not in love with the present world and will not turn back from the things of Christ, but will remain faithful to the end, testifying to the grace of God sustaining and keeping us through the pressures of life. Thank you for these wonderful letters that encourage us to this end, until the Day dawns and every shadow flees away. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

Title: The End of the Road
By: Ray C. Stedman
Series: Studies in Second Timothy
Scripture: 2 Tim 4:9-22
Message No: 13
Catalog No: 3794
Date: June 13, 1982

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